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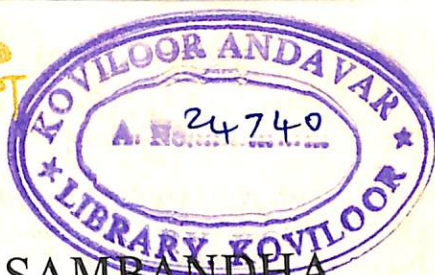
GURU JNANA SAMBANDHAR

THE PHILOSOPHER INSPIRED BY MADURAI

T.N. Jayaraman

DHARMAPURAM ADHINAM

தி.ந. உலகநாதன்



GURU JNANA SAMBANDHA

THE PHILOSOPHER INSPIRED BY MADURAI

*(Issued under the orders of His Holiness
The Head of the Dharmapuram Adhinam)*

அன்பளிப்பு :

தஞ்சாவூர்

நடராஜ பிள்ளை உலகநாதன் M.A.B.T

M. ARUNACHALAM

அன்பளிப்பு :

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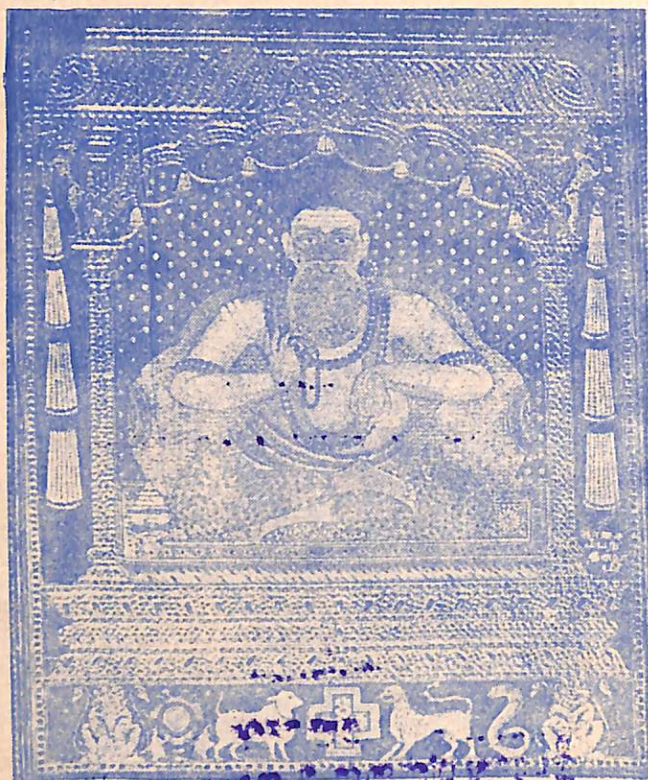
DHARMAPURAM ADHINAM
DHARMAPURAM

1981

**BENEDICTION FROM HIS HOLINESS
SRI LA SRI SHANMUKA DESIKA
JNANASAMBANDHA PARAMACHARYA
HEAD OF THE DHARMAPURAM MUTT**

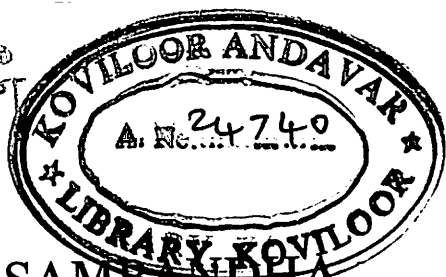
This life of Saint Guru Jnanasambandhar which is now presented to the Delegates has a relevance and message for this Fifth International Seminar-Conference of Tamil Studies being held at Madurai this year, in January 1981. The first Saint Jnanasambandhar (c. 640-656) was born about 1350 years ago in the Chola country and his signal service to the cause of Tamil culture was performed in this city of Madurai by reviving the ancient Tamil culture, the Tamil language and literature, its music and religion, and its values in life. His contributions in all these fields are too well known to require any mention here.

Guru Jnanasambandhar, having the same name and coming nine hundred years later than he (1550-1600) had his spiritual guidance again in this holy city of Madurai which made him forsake his father and mother, and go forth on the quest of a spiritual preceptor, which took him through the ancient city of Tiru Arur, and had its fruition in service to humanity at Dharmapuram near Mayuram, where he founded a monastery for carrying on the torch lit by



ST. Gurugnanasambandha
Founder of the Dharmapuram Adhinam

உலகநாதன்



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His Holiness
Sri-La-Sri Shanmuka Desika Gnanasambandha
Paramacharya Swamigal

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the first Jnanasambandhar at Madurai and elsewhere. The line of Guru Jnanasambandhar continues unbroken to this day and the work of fostering Tamil culture and the Tamil religion is being continued in this centre.

It may be recalled that Saint Kumaragurupara (c. 1640-1689) who carried the torch of Tamil culture and religion to Banaras in the north in the days of the Moghul rule at Delhi was a disciple of the religious order of Dharmapuram. He also passed through Madurai, receiving the Grace of Sakti Minakshi and Lord Somasundara enshrined here.

Like St. Tiru Jnanasambandhar, St. Guru Jnanasambandhar and St. Kumaraguruparar have also enriched the Tamil language by giving a record of their spiritual experiences in fine Tamil poetry. Needless to add, the growth and development of the Sacred order of Dharmapuram is the growth and development of Tamilnadu in all its aspects of art and culture.

May this Seminar send forth in the tradition of those great saints, the message of the great Tamil culture and religion, namely faith in God as Love and Truth, to the four quarters of the globe, through the many International Scholars who have assembled here.

May Thy Glory spread
Over the whole world,
My Lord enshrined at Madurai!

St. Tiru Jnanasambandhar.

PREFACE

Philosophy runs in the veins of the Indian ; much more so of the Tamilian, in whose land Siva the Supreme dwells ; Manikkavacakar sang :

Hail, Siva, Lord of the South,
Hail, Lord of all the realms.

Innumerable have been the inspired savants who were born in this land and who had promulgated the Saiva faith by their tours, songs, worship and their living. When foreign invasions sought to undermine and destroy the ageless cult of the Saivas, many gifted seers were born here, through God's grace to lead the people in the path of God and follow their ancient religion with greater faith and determination. Some of those seers were exponents of philosophy and authors of philosophical treatises ; besides they had founded religious orders which trained mature minds to live a godly life and help other struggling souls to advance in the path of God. One such seer was Guru Jnanasambandhar, founder of the Dharmapuram Adhinam and monastery ; he was besides a realised seer, an exponent of philosophy, and the author of many philosophical treatises.

An account of the life Guru Jnanasambandhar and of his message is given in these pages in the hope that it would strengthen the people's faith in God and would also help them to appreciate the religious work done by the followers of Guru Jnanasambandhar better.

The earlier version of this book was issued in May 1972. This is a completely revised version. It is now being issued on the occasion of the Fifth International Seminar—Conference of Tamil Studies, January 1981 and is presented to the delegates to the Conference, with the Benediction of the present Head of the Dharmapuram Mutt in the hope that it may help towards a deeper understanding of the Tamilnadu, its culture and religion among the foreign delegates participating in the Seminar. The new title of the book which highlights the inspiration which Saint Guru Jnanasambandar received in this great city of Madurai will indicate the appropriateness of the publication of the book on this occasion.

4th January, 1981.

M. ARUNACHALAM

CONTENTS

Benediction	iii
Preface	v

Section 1

Introduction	3
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Section 2

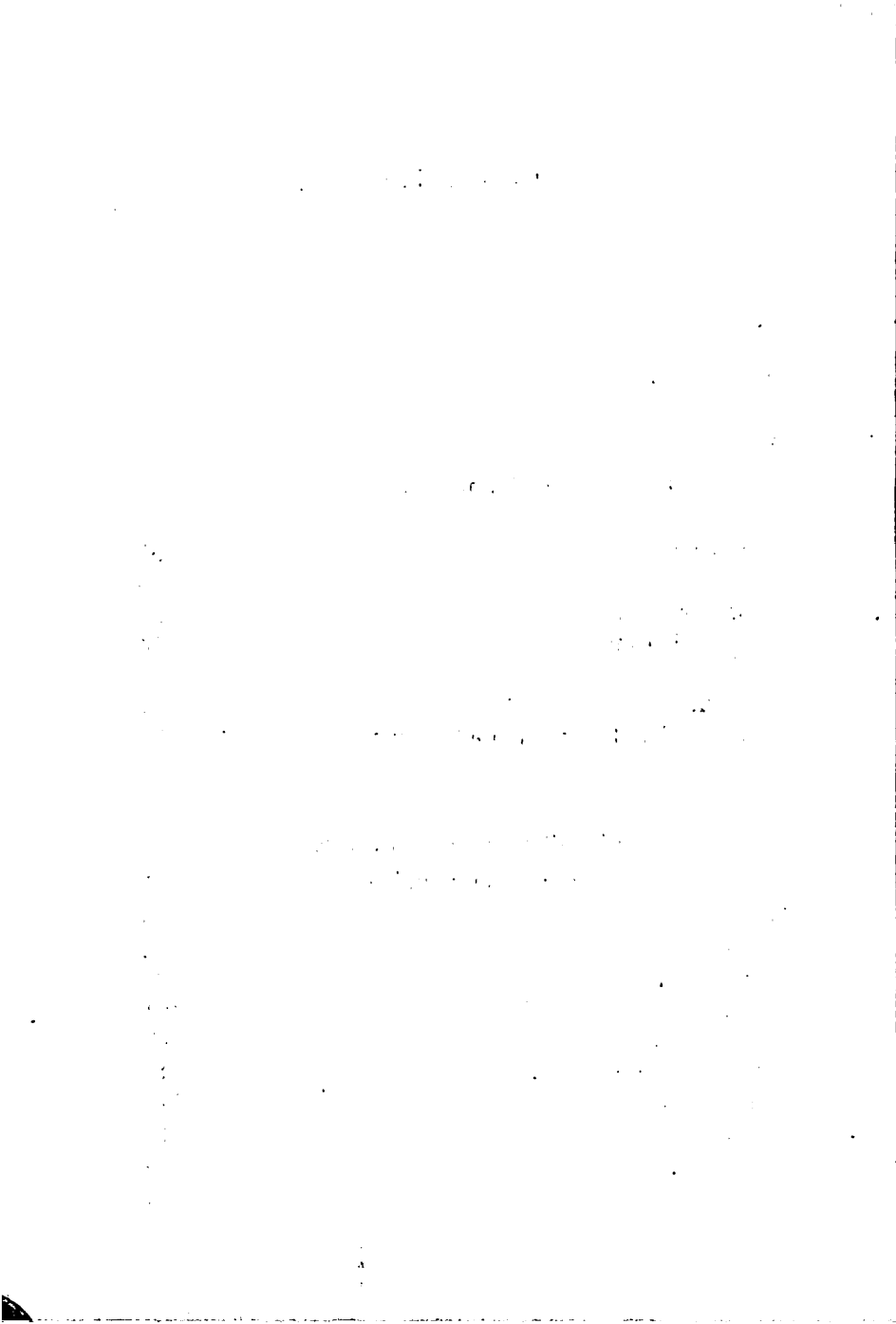
The Life of Guru Jnana Sambandhar

Srivilliputhur	31
Madurai	35
Tiru Arur	..	..	45
Dharmapuram	..	..	57
Chidambaram	..	..	64
Samadhi	..	..	72
The Adhinam	..	..	77
The Works of Guru Jnana Sambandhar	..	..	82

Section 3

Guru Jnana Sambandhar in his own words

Sayings of Guru Jnana Sambandhar	..	..	91
On Himself	..	..	93
On God	..	..	96
On His Grace	..	..	99
On His Guru	..	..	101
On Karma	..	..	107
On the Means	..	..	110
On Philosophy	..	..	112
On Prayer	..	..	115
His Message	..	..	118
Benediction	..	..	122



SECTION 1
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

HINDUISM

The declaration that whenever there is a decline of *Dharma* on the earth, Bhagavan incarnates himself as a human being to remove *adharma* and set *Dharma* on its proper course is placed in the mouth of Lord Krishna in the battle field of Kurukshetra. It applies with equal force to all the sects of the Vaidika religions which we now call Hinduism. Not only does God incarnate, but He also causes the evolution of Saints and enlightened Seers in the different sects to appear from time to time, and by their example, work and sayings (upadesa) direct the people on the path of God. Guru Jnana Sambandha was such a great Saint and enlightened Seer, who was given the mission of directing people on a god-ward path.

Hinduism is the collective name by which the various religious faiths, which had moulded the life and thought of the people of India through several millennia in the past, are generally known.

The word Hindu is not found in the two classical languages of India, Tamil and Sanskrit. There was no need, in the remote past, for the people of India to identify themselves by any name. But outsiders had the need. The Khyber pass on the northwest of India, in the Himalaya mountain region, was the path through which outsiders had any land entry into India. The first great element which barred their entry into this country was the river Sindhu of the modern Punjab, celebrated in Sanskrit lore as one of seven sacred rivers. Outsiders had called the river Sindhu, the *Indus*. So they called this land, 'the land beyond the Indus (Sindhu)', India; they called the people here as 'the people beyond the Indus, the *Hindus*. The religion of these people, the Hindus, came naturally to be designated as *Hinduism*. But the people themselves had called their religion the *Vaidika* religion, one that followed the Vedas, because in the early periods all the religious sects in this country owed an allegiance to the Vedas. They never called themselves Hindus or their religion Hinduism; but the two terms were quite handy by which the people and their religion could be referred to by the others and so they stuck. The people of this land also adopted the name Hindu for themselves and Hinduism for their religion and they called their land which had earlier been known as Bharata, now as *India*.

Hinduism in time divided itself into many sects adhering to certain basic tenets which were worked out differently by the different Seers who founded

those sects. The basic tenets may be enumerated in a few words. God is one, and mankind is one whose ultimate goal is to realise that God and reach Him or His feet and merge with Him. Attachments such as 'I' and 'mine' constitute the fetters which hinder the realisation of God. Through attachment man functions, and in the functioning the cycle of *karma*, action and its effects, begins to operate. This operation goes on, not in one birth only, but in innumerable births. So there is birth and re-birth, and ultimately in God's own time and through His own Grace, this cycle stops its rotation and man attains release from the fetters or gets salvation. These tenets are common to all the different sects of Hinduism, which are Vedic religions.

In the Tamilnadu, which is in the southern tip of peninsular India, two branches of Hinduism Saivism and Vaishnavism had been widely followed from the days of known history. They had produced a vast galaxy of eminent leaders or *acharyas* and a rich volume of soul-stirring devotional poetry, and had been responsible for the construction of huge edifices as Temples for God, and for the conduct of congregational worship therein several times a day on all the days of the year. Both the religions have held that God is one and that mankind is one. Besides the Vedas (the Upanishads) which are the scriptures for all branches of Hinduism, the two religions had evolved their own scriptures in the Tamil language and called them also as the Veda (the Tamil Veda). These two

sects of the Hindu religion are today lived and practised in their daily lives by millions of the Tamil people. Each has its own philosophy which runs parallel to the other, culminating in the One, which is called Siva in the Saiva religion and Vishnu in the Vaishnava religion.

SAIVISM

Of the two faiths, the Saiva faith has been hailed by many thinkers and scholars as the ancient and indigenous faith, which had prevailed not only in the south but in the whole of India from the pre-historic past. From an investigation of the excavations at Mohenjadarro and Harappa, Sir John Marshall declared that *Saivism was the most ancient living religion of the world*. A great many western scholars have expressed similar thoughts.

“Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy is the choicest product of the Dravidian intellect; it is the most elaborate, influential, and undoubtedly the most intrinsically valuable of all the religions of India.”¹

“There is no school of thought and no system of faith that comes to us with anything like the claims of the Saiva Siddhanta. As a system of religious thought, as an expression of faith and life, the Saiva Siddhanta is by far the best that South India possesses. Indeed, it would not be rash to include the whole of India and to maintain that, judged by its intrinsic merits, the

¹G.U. Pope

Saiva Siddhanta represents the high water-mark of Indian life.”²

The same Saiva faith which existed in the whole of India some seven thousand years ago is still followed in the South of India, in the Tamilnad, by about forty million people, in its most cultured and universal form. Vast sections of the Tamilians settled in overseas territories like Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Fiji and some other places yet follow the Saiva faith. Hinduism is the state religion of Nepal, which is a sovereign state in the Himalayan region. The king and the people there are the followers of Saivism. Kashmir in the extreme north of India is another part of India, like Tamilnad in the extreme south, which follows the Saiva sect of the Hindu religion. It is still a living faith that shapes the lives and aspirations of these people, guides their destinies, brings solace and peace to the afflicted, and holds forth, amidst all the encircling gloom, a definite assurance of redemption, of hope and comfort even to the humblest.

ANTIQUITY OF SAIVISM

The growth, development and diffusion of the Saiva religion and the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy in Tamilnad is traceable with a fair degree of authenticity from the beginning of the Christian era. *Tolkappiyam*, probably earlier than 300 B.C., had evolved a poetic convention of four physio-graphical regions and the

²W. Goudie.

tutélary deities thereto in the matter of arranging its poetry on love themes. The classification has come down the centuries and points to one special feature. Muruha (*Seyon*) is the deity for the hills and the hilly parts ; *Mayon* (Vishnu) for the forest tracts; Indra for the plains; and Varuna for the coastal area. Kotravai, an aspect of Sakti has been designated the deity for the region of the desert land. In this classification it is significant that Siva, who was of course definitely known in the period, has not been assigned any particular tract. This was obviously because Siva was held Supreme and considered as the deity to whom all the regions belonged and so no one region was set apart for Him.

A *sutra* of Tolkappiyam, though it does not mention the name Siva, seems to define Siva as the Point where all attachment ceases. Speaking about invocations to God the author mentions three states-Kodinilai, *Kandazhi* and Valli, of which *Kandazhi* has been held by most scholars to refer to Siva.

Again, defining what is a book, the First Book, Tolkappiyar says that that is the First Book which is revealed by the Great One of wisdom untainted by *vinai* (action or *karma*). This One is also considered to refer to Siva.

Scholars are of the opinion that such terms as *Patratran* and *Semporul* occurring in *Tirukkural* do signify Siva.

Siva is found referred to in the poetry of the Sangham

age as He under the ficus tree, the blue-throated One, the One who has Sakti on His left half, He with the bull banner, He with the matted locks, He with the bull mount, He with the crescent moon, the three-eyed One, He who destroyed the three forts, He who has Ganga on His locks, the Eight armed One, the Wielder of the battle-axe and the like.

All these indicate the existence of the Siva cult from very ancient times in the Tamilnad and the whole of India. Two more evidences may be cited. One is the predominance of Siva shrines in the Tamilnad. Temples here were first constructed with mud walls, then perhaps in timber, then with bricks, and latterly in granite. The number of Siva temples is to be counted in thousands while the others only in tens. Attention may also be drawn there to an unusual reference in the Tamil Vaishnava canon where Tirumangai Alvar, one of its canonised saints, mentions, while singing at the Tiru Naraiyur temple of Vishnu built by Ko-Chengan Chola, that the Chola had built seventy *Madak-koil* (temples on an elevated base) to Siva. Again, the *Velli Ambalam* of Madurai (as the Silver Dance Hall of Nataraja) is referred to in the books written immediately after the Sangham age. According to all traditions, the Silver Hall was a later innovation made after the more ancient Golden Hall of Chidambaram. These traditions also testify to the great antiquity of Siva worship and to its being the religion of the Tamils, throughout the Bharata varsha more than two thousand years ago.

Tiru Muruhatruppadaï is placed as the first poem among the ten songs of *Pattupaattu*, one of the nine anthologies of the Sangham poetry. It is a long panegyric on Muruha, who is known as the son of Siva in *puranic* lore but considered just to be one of the twentyfive manifest forms of Siva in Saiva Philosophy. Many songs in *Paripadal* praise Muruha, who is credited with six camping shrines ; one of them is named *Kunrutoradal*, not any shrine in particular, but all hill shrines in the land.

All religions here are revealed religions. The religious philosophies have been enunciated by a prophet and codified by him. Saivism is not such a revealed religion, nor was it revealed to any prophet. We may consider it as an evolved religion, one which naturally evolved itself from the culture of the Tamil people. However, we also find Siva and His *mantra* mentioned in the central *mantra* of the three Vedas—Rig, Yajur and Sama—in the heart of the Yajur veda—as *namas-Sivaya cha* ; *Namas-Sivaya* as is well known is the *mula mantra* of Saivism ; Saint Manikkavacakar begins his *Tiruvacakam* with this term as *Namas-Sivaya*—

Siva is mentioned in *Silappadhikaram* of a slightly later period as the great Lord whose form is never born. Further on, the same epic refers to Siva. Seran Senkuttuvan starts on his expedition to the Ganges. Priests of the Siva and the Vishnu temples bring him the offerings from the temples as what we call *prasadam* in the modern day. The poem says :

“Senkuttuvan placed the floral *prasadams* of Siva on his crowned head, and the *prasadams* of Vishnu on his handsome shoulders.”

All these indicate the continuous flow of devotional and philosophic literature right from before the Sangham age down to the present day.

SAIVISM IN THEORY

Sat Chit Ananda is said to be the definition of God in Saivism. It is Truth, Knowledge and Bliss—Life, Light and Love. We know in the twentieth century, Mahatma Gandhi considered Truth as God and emphasized through all his speeches and writings, and his very living, that Truth and Love are just like the two faces of a coin and that God is the coin. His life is a luminous example to show that it is really possible to translate this highest philosophy into a way of living. Saivism indicates that way of living. Saint Tiru Mular in his *Tirumantram* has categorically declared that *LOVE IS GOD*.

The term *Sivam* is a vedic term, and it means *that which confers happiness*. Even other religious books had termed the state of eternal bliss as *Sivagati*, the State of Goodness. Thus, *Sivam* may be taken to have signified a state of perfect goodness and happiness for which everyone has to strive. That state has been personified as the Supreme Reality, Siva, and those who strive to attain it have been called the Saivas.

The traditional definition of Saivism also conforms to this view. Saivism is always an open religion; it absorbs all things into its fold; it does not rail at others. The goal is one; it is the same for all; the paths leading to it are many. Saivism has no quarrel with people who follow paths other than its own. 'Cows are many coloured; but their milk is all white.' 'Even when narrow minded persons speak of other religions out of spite, our Lord does not disapprove of them. Still, he is beyond all and every one of them.' 'When one religion asserts this is my religion, this is my philosophy, and this is my book, and *not* any thing else, then that religion is not any of these. That which seeks to harmonise all differences and to synthesize them into one that is the true religion, the true philosophy and the true book." Saivism aims at bringing about this integration. These are statements from the Saiva scriptures.

SAIVISM IN PRACTICE

There are a few characteristics which are the distinguishing marks of Saivism in observance. The first is its abhorrence of meat-eating. 'Love is God' declared Tiru Mular, a canonized saint in the fifth century. In this concept of love, man certainly can not kill, nor can he eat the flesh of animals, since all are children of God. Secondly, Saivism believes that the Supreme Being which cannot be perceived by the senses reveals itself to the souls at the proper moment, in the form of a *guru*. A *guru* is therefore to be venerated as Siva Himself. The third feature is the worship

of the symbol of Siva in the temples as Siva Himself.

Saivism, transcends caste. The saints in Saivism glorified in the past had hailed from all the different sections of the community from the brahmin down to the lowest caste ; every one was considered member of a Saiva democracy, provided love of Siva reigned supreme in the heart of the individual. Women are as much lovers of God as men, and in the Saiva galaxy of Saints there are also many women.

A number of saints had lived between the fifth and the twelfth centuries and they had sung devotional songs on Siva the Supreme, wherein the deepest emotions of love and surrender had been poured forth, along with the fulness and abundance of a blissful god-experience. The major part of the songs, since collected into the Saiva canon of Twelve Books (called Saiva *Tiru Murai*) constitute the cream of *Tamil lyrical poetry* and also of *its devotional music*. These hymns form the basic material for the modern Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy. Philosophy is the systematization of the experiences and intuitions of the sage and the saint. The hymns of the saints contain the quintessence of that philosophy in the form of devotional songs. They had moulded the character and outlook of generations of the Tamil people and their culture. They had so influenced the Chola emperors who ruled the Tamil country from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries that they studded the country with temples for Siva in granite, which are now existing in all their glory, even after the lapse of a thousand

years. The number of such huge temples has caused foreign critics to remark that 'the Tamils are a race of temple builders.' No higher tribute to the universality of the Saiva faith can be paid.

The Pallavas at Kanchi in the North and the Pandyas at Madurai in the South had been rulers of great empires. Many of them had been followers of Saivism while a few had been followers of the Vaishnava and the Jain faiths. But all the Chola monarchs without a single exception had been followers of the Saiva faith.

THE SAIVA ACHARYAS

The greatest among the Saiva Saints for all time were the four *Samaya acharyas* (spiritual teachers) Saint Tiru Jnanasambandhar, Saint Appar, Saint Sundarar and Saint Manikkavachakar. These are historical figures, who had lived from the seventh to ninth centuries. They had toured the many Siva shrines in the Tamil country, and had sung their devotional songs under an ecstatic god-intoxication in each place. The devotional songs of these acharyas and the others, about eighteen thousand verses, had been collected into the Saiva canon of the *Twelve Books*.

This small book deals with the life of Saint Guru Jnanasambandhar, the Founder of the Dharmapuram Monastery. In all Saiva Hagiology, the name Jnanasambandhar is a haloed name. The great acharya who perpetuated this name was Saint Tiru Jnana-

sambandhar, the first Saiva teacher. A short account of his life and work will be relevant here.

SAINT THIRU JNANASAMBANDHAR

Tiru Jnanasambandhar was one of the most illustrious names in all Tamil literary and religious history, indeed a magic name. In the days when the entire Tamil Nadu was overcast with the clouds of alien religious repression, the grace of Siva considered it fit to have the *avatar* of a great soul for the resuscitation of the Tamil language and its culture and the Saiva religion. The person who was given that mission was Tiru Jnanasambandhar.

He was born in Sikali in the Chola country and at the young age of three, Divine Grace visited him. It is said that Parasakti fed him Her own milk of Grace in a cup, when the child cried for its own father who was immersed in the waters of the temple tank during a bath. Immediately he acquired supreme knowledge and also the gift of poesy. He travelled from early childhood through the entire country, visiting temples, singing songs, helping people even materially and directing them to a godly way of life. He received a pair of golden cymbals from Siva for marking time while singing as a little child in the temple so that his little hands may not hurt in marking time for the songs, a palanquin on which to ride on his travels since he could not walk long distances, a pearl umbrella and canopy for protection against the sun, trumpets and such other articles of comfort ; they were given to him by God, to help him, child that he was. He

always prayed to God for the relief of people from suffering. His prayers had worked many miracles; they had helped the daughter of a local chief to get over a painful bodily affliction, helped the devotees of God to get over fevers during a spell of cold; helped a young damsel to bring back to life her lover who had died of a snake bite; helped the people to get over a scourge of famine by grant of gold; enabled the devotees to cross a river in an unmanned boat; and helped a follower of Siva by making all his male palmyra trees bear fruit. He gave his father a purse of gold from God, to perform a sacrifice, for overcoming evil and for spreading good. His most glorious achievement was his struggle with the jain priests at Madurai in the presence of the Pandiya King. At the request of the Pandiya Queen he went there, had several contests with them in philosophic discussion, and came out successful with the help of God in all of them. The King's fever was cured by him, the palm leaf on which his song was written was fresh and unscorched when placed on the fire, and another such leaf from his songs floated on the water against the current of the river Vaihai. His miracles won the king back to the Saiva faith. Appar, an elder saint of the same period, heard of his love of God and of the miracles performed on his account, saw him and the two became friends. One Nilakantha, a low caste musician playing on the Yaal, himself a saintly soul, came to him with his wife and accompanied his songs on the instrument. Sambandhar once demonstrated to him the superiority of his vocal music, while the

instrument was only man-made. At Mayilappur, through Divine Grace again, he caused the bones of a dead girl to come back to life as a full grown girl, for the love of her father. Returning home from his travels, he took part in his own wedding function, and clasping the hand of his bride, entered a huge Divine Effulgence along with all those assembled there for the wedding function, and attained final beatitude.

Saint Tiru Jnanasambandhar always called himself a Tamilan and in his songs gave the assurance to the Tamil people that *his songs were the word of God* and that they would lead the singer to final beatitude. Saint Sundarar, who lived some fifty years after him, says that *Sambandhar did propaganda for Tamil through music* and for this purpose was given a pair of cymbals by God. Here and elsewhere in all the hymns, the word Tamil is synonymous with Saivism.

The incidents in the life of Sambandhar are many. To help suffering people, he caused miracles to happen. He never asked for anything for himself but always prayed for divine intercession for relieving the suffering of mankind. That was the keynote of his life, quite in consonance with his young and impulsive age. Tiru Jnanasambandhar was a saint with a definite mission in life. The mission was relief of the suffering of mankind, propagation of the Saiva religion through his songs and the restoration of the Tamil culture and Tamil music also through

his songs. He was the one person responsible for restoring all that is great in the three divisions of Tamil today, at a period when it was threatened with extinction by an alien clan. He had visited the largest number of shrines, had sung the largest number of songs on God, and had sung the largest number of tunes. The musical tunes which are called today *raga* were called in his day *pann* and, had he not taken steps in his day to preserve the *panns* and propagate them, we would not have had what is now known as *carnatic* music at all. No wonder he has been hailed by later writers as an *avatara* and as the *first Saiva Acharya*. His story is narrated by Sekkilar in his *Periya puranam* in 1256 verses.

We may briefly touch upon one aspect in the portrayal of the life of Jnanasambandhar by Sekkilar in his *Periya Puranam*. The concept of an acharya takes shape later in Vaishnavism with the Nammalvar-Nathamuni relationship where Nammalvar is considered as the last Alvar and the first Acharya. In Saivism however, the distinct Acharya line begins with Meykandar. But Sekkilar seems to have portrayed Jnanasambandhar also as an acharya. The feeding of milk to the child by Sakti, the conferment of a palanquin, umbrella and trumpet (*chinnam*) which are the insignia of an acharya and the attitude of St. Appar at Tiru Vaymur towards him, all go to indicate that he has indeed been portrayed as an acharya.

SANTANA ACHARYAR

Some time after Tiru Jnanasambandhar attained beatitude, we have a succession of Saiva preceptors, one following the other as master and disciple. These again are traditionally four and they are called the Santana Acharyas as they came in a line of succession promulgating the Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy (*santanam*—lineage). The *Santana* acharyas reduced the cream of philosophical thought contained in the songs of the *Samaya* acharyas into a logical and reasoned exposition of the ultimate realities of philosophy. These acharyas are Meykandar, Arulnandi Sivacharyar, Marai Jnanasambandhar of Kandanai and Umapati Sivacharyar. These had lived from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries; they had not toured the shrines but had stayed in their own place, teaching the students who came to them for enlightenment. Meykandar had founded the religious order of Saivism and after him the others were the heads of the holy line one after the other, in the same order. This line of spiritual teachers is traditionally considered to have descended from Siva the Supreme Guru of Kailas; the order of instruction was from Siva to Nandi, to Sanatkumara, to Satya Jnana-darsini, to Sage Paranjoti and lastly to Meykandar. Hence the preceptors upto Paranjoti were on the celestial plane; the line of teachers on the terrestrial plane begins with Meykandar. Hence the line of Meykandar is known as the *Tiru Kailaya Paramparai* (the line of instruction from Kailas).

The Tamil term Meykandar is practically a translation of the name of Paranjoti's guru Satya Jnana darsini, meaning one who had realisation of the Supreme Truth. Legends say that Meykandar had his initiation from Sage Paranjoti at the early age of two. He wrote the first manual of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy known as *the Siva Jnana Bodham*, consisting of twelve short aphorisms (in a total of forty lines) with eightyone explanatary notes in verse, in the Tamil language. This book is the first and basic text for the Saiva Siddhanta system. According to the Saiva tradition, the line of spiritual headship from Meykandar is also known as the *Meykanda Paramparai*.

MARAI JNANA SAMBANDHAR

The name of Tiru Jnana Sambandhar had become in the years pregnant with meaning and spiritual significance. We find that the third Santana Acharya was named Marai Jnana Sambandhar. This Acharya, was born as a brahmin of the *Sama Veda* division in Kadandai and had been named also Jnanasambandhar. He received instruction in the Saiva spiritual knowledge from Saint Arulnandi and was anointed Acharya after him. To distinguish him from the great boy-saint of Sikali, he was called Marai Jnanasambandhar (where *Marai* stands for the veda denoting his brahmin extraction). This Acharya was a supremely realized soul.

Ascetics of those days lived on the alms given to them in one or two houses. Umapati who belonged

to the exclusive class of archakas, privileged to offer worship to Nataraja in Chidambaram, was a very erudite and affluent person. He was going along the main streets of the city one day on his palanquin with lighted torches, trumpets and other regal paraphernalia as usual. Marai Jnanasambandhar noticed him and exclaimed, "Look at this day-blind man riding dead wood!" (Marai Jnana's meaning was that the palanquin was dead wood, being made of wood and the rider was day-blind, because lighted torches were borne before him as an insignia of his eminence even during day time.) The words reached the ears of Umapati who immediately understood that the words came from an enlightened master, jumped down from his palanquin, fell at the feet of the other, and prayed that he be taken as his disciple and knowledge imparted to him. Marai Jnanasambandhar did not reply him, but went along the streets in his usual way, with Umapati following. He perhaps intended to test the fitness of Umapati for discipleship. No need to say that a disciple of those days was expected to have overcome all thoughts of 'I' and 'Mine'. On the way was a weaver sizing the warp of his cloth piece. Marai Jnanasambandhar stopped before him, asked him to pour some *conjee* (boiled rice flour in liquid form used for sizing) into his cupped hands and drank it. Instantly, without the least hesitation, Umapati stretched his hand and holding the *conjee* which was dripping along the elbow of Marai Jnana, drank it. (The remnants of the Preceptor's meal when partaken by the disciple were considered efficacious in raising him

spiritually.) This was evidence enough for the spiritual advancement of the disciple. Marai Jnana recognized it and made Umapati his disciple, and in time the next Acharya.

Marai Jnanasambandhar himself has written a short book of 106 *venba* verses in the name of *Sata manik-kovai*. It is in the form of questions on spiritual matters for which he supplies the answer in a short phrase. His book is considered an authoritative work among later Saiva writers. We have seen that after Meykandar, Saints Arulnandi, Marai Jnanasambandhar and Umapati were the spiritual heads or acharyas in succession as master and disciple. Arul Namasivayai was the disciple of Umapati.

THE SAIVA SCHOOLS

The acharyas after Umapati seem to have had many disciples each and through each a distinct school of Saivism developed. Siddhar Sivaprakasara was a great disciple of Arul namasivayai and his disciple was Saint Namasivaya Murti of Muvalur. He was the founder of the Tiruvavaduturai Adhinam, an illustrious monastery of Tamilnadu. Another line branches off from him and exists now at Sepparai in Tirunelveli.

Another disciple of Arulnamasivayai was Gangai Meykandar of Sikali from whom developed the Dharmapuram Adhinam. After him Chitrambalanadihal, Sambandha munivar, Sivapuram Jnanaprakasara, Sivapuram Tatuvaiprakasara, Chettithiru

Jnanaprakasar and lastly Kamalai Jnanaprakasar came in line one after the other in succession. Guru Jnanasambandhar was the disciple of Kamalai Jnanaprakasar, the founder of the Jnanapeeta now known as the Dharmapuram Adhinam. Beginning from Saint Arulnamasivayar, Guru Jnanasambandhar was the eighth in the order of the acharyas. Some of them have also been illustrious spiritual leaders who had written valuable treatises on the Saiva metaphysics and philosophy, but it was this Jnanasambandhar who established the religious order in one place, namely Dharmapuram, and from there ushered in a new order of light and spiritual wisdom into the Saiva world.

The keynote of the lives of these acharyas is an absolute surrender to the will of God. After such a surrender, it is as though God takes over the direction of the soul through life. Such had been the case with Guru Jnanasambandhar, the founder of the Dharmapuram Adhinam. We shall see in the following pages how his life had been moulded and directed by the hand of God and how he was chosen to succeed an unbroken line of disciples from Siva Himself, the Lord on Mount Kailas. The holy line of preceptors from Guru Jnanasambandha continues unbroken to this day.

THE ATTRACTION OF CHILDHOOD IN THE HINDU RELIGION

Guru Jnanasambandhar came under divine guidance while yet a boy. In the Hindu religion, the appearance

of God in the form of a child is a most endearing feature. Childhood has always held the greatest attraction for our poets and seers. In Saivism, Muruga, is always the young child, the darling of the six Karthikai Nymphs; he is riding the peacock; the Balasubrahmanya form is the most alluring. His exploits form the subject of the great *Kanda Purana* in 10345 Tamil verses.

Equally so in the Vaishnava religion. All the Vaishnava saints have sung wonderful hymns on the boyhood of Krishna. He is Kannan in the Tamil language and two *Bhagavata puranas* celebrate his exploits in 4973 and 9147 verses. Periyalvar is never tired of singing the beauty of Balakrishna and his pranks.

The attraction is not only to the divine child form but also to child bhaktas of the Itihasas. The *puranic* stories of Dhruva, Prahlada and Markkandeya are stories of children who are intoxicated with the idea of God and have surrendered to Him. Dhruva as a small child could not secure the affections of his father because of his stepmother, and so beginning a *tapas*, on the advice of his mother to get the affections, he became a true lover of God and the intensity of his love was recognized by God who made him a star in the heavens, the Polestar.

Prahlada was the son of a great *rakshasa* the personification of temporal power, who uttering the name of God, refused to recognize his father as the Supreme

Power, caused God Himself to save him from his father's many attempts to kill him, and finally was instrumental in the avatara of God as Narasimha to kill that father. Prahlada is fondly called by the Vaishnavas *Prahlada-alvar*.

Markkandeya, whose life span was fixed as sixteen years, caused God Himself, by his own Siva puja of complete surrender, to appear from the Linga and kick off to death, Yama himself, and thereafter became one of the *Chiranjivis* (the Deathless).

These three *puranaic* names are household words in the whole of India.

The story of Chandesa is also the story of a child. Born as a brahmin boy, given the work of tending cows, his puja of a Siva Linga of sand with the cows' milk on the banks of the river is disapproved by his own father who kicked at his milk pot. When Chandesa hit at the foot of his father with a stick, the foot was severed in the two. For this act of love to God, he was raised to be the head of the Sivaganas and a sub-temple is given to him in every Siva shrine, with daily puja. He is one of the sixtythree Saiva nayanmar.

Coming to historical times, we have in Saivism the story of Jnanasambandhar of Sikali who had a divine visitation at the age of three, which made him the first Saiva samaya Acharya. Sikali is a haloed place, because of his birth and holds equal rank with Chidam-

baram as a great centre of religious activities. Again we have the story of Nambiyandar Nambi of Tiru Naraiyur who was responsible for discovering the *Devaram* hymns and for codifying them into the *Tirumurai*, the Saiva canon or Hymn Books. As a very young boy the Grace of Polla-pillaiyar (Ganapati of that place) fell on him and guided him to the *Devaram* in the days of the Chola Emperor Raja Raja I (985-1014 A.D.).

Meykandar, the son born to Achuta Kalappala through divine prompting, was playing in the streets of Tiruvennainallur at the age of two, where the celestial sage, Paranjoti who was having an aerial flight over the place, came down and instructed the little child in Sivajnana and named him Meykandar, the Seer of Truth. This child became the first spiritual preceptor, Santana Acharya, for Saivas. Almost all the Saiva Mutts in South India trace their ancestry to him.

Saint Kumaragurupara as a small child would not speak any words till he was five years old. Then his parents took him to the temple of Muruha at Tiruchendur, where through the grace of Muruha he opened his lips and lisped in poetry. He sang there *Kandar Kalivenba*, the fine devotional poem on Muruha.

In Vaishnavism also we have the tradition of child-saints. Nammalvar the child would not open his mouth; his parents took the child and left it under a tamarind tree in the temple. He never opened his

lips but grew in an inward spiritual joy and he opened his eyes only to answer the question of Madura Kavi.

The story of Alavandar is the story of a young child playing in the sand in the streets who became a great Vaishnava acharya by the grace of Vishnu. He was the grand son of Nathamunihal, the discoverer of the Nalayira Divya Prabandham, and the next acharya after him. His five disciples in time became the five spiritual preceptors of the great Ramanuja.

So this is the tradition of children in the Hindu religion. We shall see next that Guru Jnanasambandar also comes in the tradition of child saints.

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SECTION 2
THE LIFE OF
GURU JNANASAMBANDHAR



THE LIFE OF GURU JNANA SAMBANDHA

SRI VILLIPUTHUR

In the far south of the Tamil Country in India lies the important town of Sri Villiputhur, in modern Ramnad district. It is celebrated in legend and history as the birth place of the Vaishnava Saint, Periyal var and his foster daughter Andal, both of whom had sung inspired hymns on Lord Vishnu ; their hymns set to fine music have been collected into the first Book of the Vaishnava Canon. Guru Jnanasambandha, the illustrious founder of the Dharmapuram line of Saiva preceptors, was born in this place, in a middle class agricultural family, by the middle of the sixteenth century.

At that period there lived in this place a happy couple, Subrahmanya Pillai and his wife, Minakshi.* They belonged to a community known as the Karkatha velala community,† which was noted for its adherence

*Minakshi (= with eyes like the fish) is the name of presiding deity in the Madurai shrine, and the consort of Siva there.

†It may be remembered that Meykandar, the first preceptor of the Saiva Siddhanta order also came of this community.

to the Saiva faith and for its vegetarian way of life, from time immemorial. The vegetarian way of life symbolises love for all creation of God and it is one of the basic doctrines of Saivism. Amidst all kinds of political, social and religious turmoil during the last two thousand years in the Tamilnad, the vegetarian way of food, called the *Saiva* way of food, has been held in the greatest esteem and veneration in the land. Even today, the term Saiva is equated with the vegetarian way of food. The Karkathar clan had been held in great veneration by other communities from the beginning of the Christian era because of its identity with vegetarianism.

The community traces its legendary origin to Umadevi, the consort of Siva, who performed *Sivapuja* at Kanchipuram aeons ago and had delegated to these people the religious duty of performing the thirtytwo traditional *dharma*s (duties in life and charities).

Subrahmanyam and his family were worshippers of Lord Siva. The couple led an ideal householder's life, devoting their resources to the worship of Siva, both in the temple and in their home, and to the feeding of the devotees of God, as prescribed in the scriptures. In due time, the grace of Siva settled on the couple and an illustrious son was born to them at an auspicious moment, on a Monday (Somavara), held sacred to Siva. A divine radiance lit up the peaceful countenance of the baby, as though it foretold a higher purpose to be fulfilled by him in time.

The name of Tiru Jnanasambandha, the boy saint of Sikali* and the first of the Saiva Samaya acharyas, was an inspiring name and held the greatest fascination among all the Saivas in the land. The parents named the child Jnanasambandha, after Tiru Jnanasambandha, in a prophetic moment of inspiration. The name signified one who had communion with Supreme Knowledge. Saint Tiru Jnanasambandha lived in the middle of the seventh century. As a small child of three years, he was fed with the milk of Supreme Knowledge by Sakti, the consort of Siva ; his life story is well known. He had toured the entire Tamil country, visiting all the important temples where Siva was enshrined and had sung about four thousand quatrains in praise of Siva. All of the songs had been set to music. He had so vigorously promulgated the Saiva faith that all the alien faiths in the land had disappeared. His songs have been collected into the Saiva canon as the first three books. They are unsurpassed, for hymnal beauty, emotional outburst, literary value and philosophical content, in the whole range of the Tamil literature of the last two thousand years.

It was indeed an inspired moment when Subrahmanyam chose the name Jnanasambandha for his son. Saint Tiru Jnanasambandha the Samayacharya was *enveloped in Divine Grace* while yet a child, and in

*For centuries after Tiru Jnanasambandha, Sikali had figured prominently in the evolution of Saiva Siddhanta in Tamilnad. It is now an important town in the Tanjavur district. It houses a large Siva temple complete with all its adjuncts and sub-temples; its administration vests with the Dharmapuram Adhinam.

like manner we shall find that this child also came under divine guidance while yet a boy.

The child grew up and in due course received all secular education both from his father and from the others. Through divine will, he easily mastered all the arts and learnt all the sastras in the Tamil and the Sanskrit languages, and attained the momentous age of sixteen. The family deity of Subrahmanaya Pillai was Lord Sundaresa of Madurai (variously known as Somasundara, Sokkanatha and Sokkalingam). Subrahmanyam was offering worship to Sokkalingam in his home daily and naturally this had made a deep impression on the young boy.

At about this time, Subrahmanya Pillai planned to go to Madurai with his wife and son and worship Lord Sundaresa there.

MADURAI

Madurai is the second largest city in the modern state of Tamilnad. It was the capital city of the Pandiya kingdom, comprising all the southernmost districts of Tamilnad. It was ruled over in ancient times by a dynasty of Tamil kings known as the Pandiyas. In religion, legend and literature, it is hailed as one of the most ancient cities in India. Saint Appar says that Lord Siva revealed Himself here in the form of a *Sivalingam* long before any other shrine came into existence. In the concept of the universe as the Cosmic Form of the Supreme Being, the Madurai shrine is considered as the mystic centre, *dvadasanta*, situated twelve inches beyond the crown of Being. The presiding deity of the city is Minakshi, the consort of Siva. According to legends, she ruled here as a princess of the Pandiya dynasty aeons ago. Lord Siva came down on earth here, wedded her and ruled over the city and the Pandiya kingdom as Her consort, Somasundara.

This city had been the greatest seat of all culture and all secular and religious learning in the ancient past. The Pandiya Rulers had established three Tamil Universities known in literary lore as the Tamil Sanghams. The Third Sangham was at Madurai. According to legends, Lord Siva Himself had taken

the form of a poet and participated in the deliberations of the universities.

During the first millennia after Christ, historical evidences are available on the line of the Pandiyas who ruled over the city. At an earlier period (by the middle of the third century A.D.) this state had been over-run by an alien tribe of Jain invaders and the Saiva religion had been suppressed. (Along with Saivism all Tamil culture and letters had been suppressed there for a period of three centuries.) At the invitation of the Pandiya queen Mangayarkkarasi, Saint Tiru Jnanasambandha visited the city in the middle of the seventh century and through God's grace vanquished his Jain opponents there in philosophical disputation, won back the king to Saivism, and restored this ancient religion in the land. Many miracles were also performed here later by Lord Sundaresa for the sake of Saint Manikkavachakar of the Tiruvachakam fame. Thus there is always a halo attached to the city through long association with religion and literature.

On an auspicious day, Subrahmanyam started for Madurai with his wife and son. He covered the distance of fifty miles in a few days and reached the city in due time. The family took part in the various occasions of worship in the temple daily and stayed there for some time, happy in the worship of Lord Sundaresa and Sakti Minakshi. Then, duties at home called them back and so Subrahmanyam and his wife set about making preparations for return to Srivilliputhur.

On the day fixed for the return journey, Subrahmanyam went to the temple as usual with his wife and took leave of Lord Sundaresa. At the time of departing however, the parents felt that their son appeared to be unwilling to move away from the shrine. They were perplexed. They could not understand the change which had come over in the mind of the young boy. From the moment when the boy saw Sundaresa and Minakshi, he experienced an inexplicable thrill of supreme joy. The temple worship always gave him a transcendent exhilaration and infinite joy and he could not wrest himself from it. The temple, the peace and the sense of elevation felt in the Divine Presence, the elaborate rituals forming part of the worship, the company of the men of God there, and the daily routine of just living for the occasion of the worship at specified hours, had the greatest appeal to all his senses and, through them, had come to have so firm a hold on his mind that he was quite unwilling to leave the presence of Siva in the temple.

His eyes feasted on the Lord, his ears devoured the devotional songs sung by the men of God in the temple, his nostrils inhaled the fragrance wafted by the incense in the sanctum, his tongue lisped devotional songs, and his person delighted in the smearing of the sacred ash of Siva. Thus all his five senses functioned for God and his mind functioning through the senses went out to prostrate at the feet of the Lord.

So, when his parents urged him to follow them home, he replied: "My dear parents, I am in duty

bound to obey you. You have no doubt given me this *body* and have a right to call me and I am bound to obey. But how can I tear myself away from the parents of my *soul*, who are enshrined in this temple and who have even a greater right over me ? I dare not follow you. Please forgive me and permit me to stay back."

The young boy now seems to have had some kind of spiritual awakening and enlightenment. He was born apparently with a mission in life, and the moment for fulfilling that mission had come. His birth as the son of Subrahmanyam and Minakshi of Srivilliputhur was nothing more than an accident. The spirit in him was eternally in bondage to the Supreme Spirit, in this case Lord Sundaresa of Madurai. So he felt he was not wrong in declining to fulfil a duty towards his natural parents. But they could not view it in such a light. They were much bewildered at such a behaviour from their only son. To dispel their anxiety and to set their mind at rest, Jnanasambandha explained to them his position as best as he could, citing also many scriptural authorities in support of his stand, and eloquently pleaded with them to permit him to stay back in Madurai and lead a spiritual life. The parents were unable to answer him, but imagined that perhaps time would cure him, and so stayed on for some more time in the city, fondly hoping that he would change his mind. But the boy was steadfast in his purpose and would not move from the shrine. Finally, realising that nothing more could be done, they left him invoking

on him the blessings of Lord Sundaresa and went home with a heavy heart. Being devout people themselves, the thought that their son might grow up spiritually evolved might perhaps have given them some solace.

Jnanasambandha continued to stay in Madurai. He was enjoying an inward peace resulting from a contemplation of the grace of God. He bathed daily at early morning in the tank of the Golden Lotus, finished his ablutions and offered worship before Sokkanatha and Minakshi in the temple. This went on for a considerable time. While going through this routine daily, his attention used to focus on the austerities practised by some men of God there. The sacred ash adorned their forehead and the *rudraksha** beads (a Saiva emblem) their bodies, their lips were uttering the *Panchakshara* mantra.† He observed that these men always sat on the paved bank of the tank facing north, placed a Siva linga in front, and offered to it a three-fold worship, complete with mantra (utterance of the mystic syllables), bhavana (contemplation) and kriya (ritual). They were beside themselves out of a divine ecstasy and, with tears of joy and faltering lips, they sang rapturously the canonical songs during their worship. As he was watching such worship of the devotees on the banks of the tank, a natural desire to

*The *eloeocarpus* tree; its small nuts are strung together to make the rosary of the Saivas.

†Mantra—mystic syllable. Panchakshara—the five mystic letters or syllables which signify the Lord's name in Saivism—*na ma si va ya*.

perform similar worship himself and get immersed in similar divine ecstasy surged up in his mind. His orthodox training made him feel that the grace of God should help him in this regard. When he went into the temple to take part in the ritualistic worship that day as usual, this desire was foremost in his mind. But he had no *murti* (image) to worship and no instruction in the mode of worship.

So, he who had so far worshipped in the temple without any desire, except for the joy of worship, now had a request to make. He prayed for a *murti* for his worship and for instruction in the ritual of personal worship. This prayer had an immediate response. That night he had a dream. The Lord appeared before him and said : "My dear boy, we are resting in a casket in the north eastern corner of the tank of the golden lotus. You may find Us there. Take the casket with you, so that you may in time be able to perform the personal worship as desired."*

Waking up, Jnanasambandha was beside himself with joy. "So Lord Sundaresa has graciously answered my humble prayer !" cried he. At daybreak he went to the lotus tank as usual, and bathed in the north eastern corner as directed in his dream. Lo ! there was the casket containing the Sokkalingam ! His joy knew no bounds. Taking it with both hands, he

*In commemoration of this incident of the bestowal of Siva's Grace on Jnanasambandha at Madurai, an image for him was installed in the temple at the time of the last Kumbhabhishekam.

placed it on his head and with tears of joy went to the sanctum of the temple and there praised the Grace of the Lord.

The young man who had till then never sung a song or composed a line of poetry, now burst into wondrous song :

Thou hast given Thyself to me, O Lord,
in a form sweet to behold.

A strange and mysterious wonder

Thou art,
praised by the celestials.

Lead me into the ocean of perfect Bliss,
O Lord Sokkanatha of Madurai.

He sang a poem of ten verses in this strain, on the grace of Sokkanatha :

Let me sing of Thee,
always think of Thee,
Let me dance in joy,
freed from all ignorance,
And seek Thine ocean of Bliss
as the only refuge,
O Lord Sokkanatha of Madurai.

Births there are none,
Misery there is none,
Which I had not gone through,
Places there are none,
Where I had not been born and died.

Enough of this sport,
 O Lord Sokkanatha of Madurai,
 In whose bowers flows
 The nectar of Supreme Bliss.

Hear my prayer, my Lord !
 May Thou dwell in this form for ever
 And redeem me from all future births,
 And confer eternal bliss
 on all who worship Thee,
 O Lord Sokkanatha of Madurai.

Jnanasambandha had now the *Sivalinga* form for worship; but he knew he was not competent to perform the worship of the Lord in that form. In the Saiva religious practice, only the initiation by a competent master will confer on one the fitness for performing even the personal worship. So he prayed : "My Lord, in Thine infinite mercy Thou hast graciously given me Thyself in this *linga* form for worship. But again I pray Thee, kindly indicate to me the master who could impart the Supreme Knowledge, and initiate me into the scriptural mode of worship, and grant me the competence therefor." After this prayer he returned to his place, his mind full with the anxiety to find a spiritual preceptor and learn the mode of worship.

That night again he had a dream. Lord Sokkanatha appeared before him and said : "My boy, proceed to Tiru Arur. You will meet there Jnanaprakasa, who hails from a line of Our disciples, who had been given spiritual instruction directly by Us. He shall be your

preceptor and he shall initiate you in the path of Supreme Knowledge and instruct you in the mode of the ritualistic worship." Needless to say, Jnanasambandha was extremely happy. He realised fully that God was guiding him every moment of his life. With this conviction, he went to the temple early in the morning, worshipped Lord Sokkanatha and Minakshi for the guidance given, and taking leave of them there, started for Tiru Arur in the north, carrying his precious treasure with him.

Kamalai Jnanaprakasara is a well known figure in the Tamil literary field as well as in the religious field. Kamalai is Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity and the consort of Vishnu. Legends say that she worshipped Siva at Tiru Arur and hence her name is associated with the place which came to be called Kamalai. The large temple tank at Tiru Arur (covering an area of thirtythree acres) also takes its name from Lakshmi and is called the Kamalalaya. This Jnanaprakasara came in the direct line of disciples from Siva at Kailas, as we have shown in the introduction. He had written many valuable religious treatises on all the aspects of Saivism—*charya*, *kriya*, *yoga* and *jnana* and has besides written two valuable *sthalapuranas* also. He had many disciples, some of whom had themselves written religious as well as literary books.

There is literary as well as inscriptional evidence to show that Kamalai Jnanaprakasara flourished by 1561-6. Hence his date may be fixed as between

1525 and 1575. Guru Jnansambandhar may therefore be considered to have lived between 1550 and 1600.

Meanwhile, Lord Siva appeared before Kamalai Jnanaprakasa in a dream, in the form of Lord Tyagaraja, the presiding deity of Tiru Arur, and directed him : "My friend, Our boy Jnanasambandha will be appearing here from Madurai on Monday and will go to you. Please receive him and initiate him in the path of Supreme Knowledge and teach him the ritualistic personal worship of Sokkalingam which he will be carrying with him." Jnanaprakasa was naturally not a little amazed. That the Lord should take so much interest in a young man and that He should command *him* to take him as a disciple and guide him along the path of Supreme Knowledge ! Surely the ways of the Lord were imponderable and inscrutable, thought he. He realised no doubt that there was some divine purpose in Siva's singling out this young man for special favour.

Jnanasambandha, who started from Madurai, visited many important shrines of Siva such as Tiru Anaikka situated in the middle of the Kaveri river at Tiruchirappalli on the way and reached Tiru Arur in due time on a Monday morning.

TIRU ARUR

Tiru Arur in the modern Tanjavur district is about 150 miles to the north east of Madurai. It is one of the most ancient cities in Tamilnad, held very sacred in Saiva legend and history. Of the five Saiva shrines dedicated to the five elements, the Arur shrine is dedicated to the element Earth. Legends say that King Manu-niti Chola, ruling here, rode his chariot over the body of his only son, as a punishment for the death of a calf caused by the prince by riding his chariot over it, although unknowingly. Saint Sundarar calls himself the servant of all that were born in this place ; the belief is that one born here attains salvation with certainty. This Saint was married to Paravai in this city and here Lord Tyagaraja had acted as a messenger of love to Sundarar. Many incidents in his life were enacted here. Earlier than Sundarar, Saint Appar had sung many moving songs on the temple ; he had said that Arur was created long before anything else was created.

The city was considered to be one of the several capital cities of the Chola emperors. The temple in this city is a very large one and the temple tank called the *Kamalalaya* is also a very large one, each covering an area of over thirty three acres.

Jnanasambandha, arriving in this city, bathed in the Kamlalaya and went straight to the presence of Lord Tyagaraja*. He poured forth his soul in his prayer to the Lord, for this was Monday, on which he was to meet his *guru*. The longing to meet Jnanaprakasa, the guru appointed by God, filled his heart and his eyes were eagerly searching for him. After praying there, he prayed in the presence of Sakti and then went the round of the corridors and the inner temples.

Jnanaprakasa in the meantime remembered that this was the day appointed for the appearance of Jnanasambandha before him. As usual, he got up early in the morning, performed his personal worship in his home, went to the temple, took part in the worship there, and going round the inner court yards of the temple, he reached the inner shrine of Siddhisvaram, situated in the northern outer courtyard. In every Siva temple there is a form of Dakshinamurti installed in the southern central niche on the outer wall of the sanctum proper. Dakshinamurti is the manifest form of Siva as the Supreme Guru. The Dakshinamurti in the Siddhisvaram shrine was the favourite deity of our Jnanaprakasa. This day as usual he came to the presence of this Murti, seated himself in front facing east, and went into meditation, expecting the arrival of Jnanasambandha.

*Tyagaraja is the particular form of Siva specially important in this shrine. The term signifies 'supreme in giving' (the King of Givers).

In due time, Jnanasambandhar reached Siddhisvaram and going round, came into the presence of Dakshina-murti. Here he saw Jnanaprakasa, with peaceful benevolent eyes, countenance radiating grace, seated in meditation. He intuitively felt, through the grace of Siva, that this was indeed the guru he was seeking, the one who could dispel the ignorance of his soul and lead him on in the godward path toward final release from all bonds and an enjoyment of eternal bliss. Like a child that instinctively runs to its mother, like a calf running to its mother cow, and like a piece of iron attracted by a magnet, he ran to the seated preceptor and fell at his feet.

Jnanaprakasar lifted the young man with both hands, gently stroked him and said 'Peace be on you'. His very touch sent an ecstatic thrill through Jnanasambandhar and appeased his spiritual hunger and transported him to ethereal heights. Jnanaprakasar then seated him facing north, bestowed his benign look on him, led him through the esoteric initiation ritual called *diksha*, imparted spiritual instruction, and taught him the ritual of Sivalinga puja. In time he introduced him to the doctrines of Saiva Siddhanta, as enunciated in the *Sivajnana siddhi*. Tradition says that when Jnanaprakasar initiated Jnanasambandhar into the doctrines of Saivism and instructed him in Siva puja, he taught them to him through an exposition of the *Sivajnana Siddhi*. This is an elaborate Tamil philosophical treatise on Saiva Siddhanta philosophy, written by Saint Arulnandi, the second of the four Santana

acharyas. It consists of two parts, the first being an examination of the various systems of philosophy, and the second planned as a systematic exposition of the Siddhanta philosophy. The second part is one of the main basic texts of the system. It contains 328 quatrains and has been written as a kind of metrical commentary on the Siva Jnanabodham of Saint Meykandar, the first of the Santana acharyas. In a verse in his *Sivabhogasaram*, Guru Jnanasambandhar himself extolls the *Siddhi* :

“Half a verse in the *Siddhi* is sufficient for those who would examine all the books of the world in order to attain salvation by scorching their three impurities, *maya*, the *anavamala* (the ego), and *karma*.”

The disciple was immensely happy that his desire to perform a personal Siva puja was fulfilled so early under the guidance of a proper guru.

Jnanasambandhar was a chosen child of God's grace, and gifted songs flowed from his lips spontaneously from then on. Extolling the grace of Jnanaprakasara, he now sang a song of thirty verses, which has since come to be known as the *Jnanaprakasa malai* (a garland of verses):

Thou art my only refuge. Thy Grace,
And my own mind know this well.
Wander wherever I might,
and born however I might be,

Can I forget Thy Grace,
O Lord Jnanaprakasa ?

My bonds he severed; my ignorance
He dispelled ; he the Lord of Kailas,
Who has now come here at Arur,
As Jnanaprakasa, He made me
Long for the All Pervasive One.

Resting, awake and jostling about,
The name of Jnanaprakasa I utter,
When hunger and ailment afflict me,
The name of Jnanaprakasa I utter,
Even when inexorable death stalks me,
The name of Jnanaprakasa I utter,
Words else, there are none.

At the same time, he sang also another poem of a hundred verses on Sokkanatha, the *murti* he was to worship thereafter ; the poem is known as the *Sokkanatha venba*. It contains a very clear exposition of some of the subtlest concepts of the Saiva Siddhanta system of philosophy, as he had learned it from his guru and as his own inward illumination had revealed to him. The initiation which he had, had bestowed on him such perfect wisdom and realisation that the three entities of Saiva Siddhanta—what are technically termed *Pati* (God), *pasu* (the soul) and *pasa* (the bonds)—their mutual relationship, and the ultimate goal of man were so clear to him that the words he now uttered served to dispel all doubts in the future followers and thinkers. The fulness of the rich

experience he was led to have by the one gracious look of the master, he is here sharing with all mankind.

When shall this body drop away from me,
When shall my *karma* and my bonds snap,
When shall my heart dance in the ocean
Of Bliss, O Blissful one, Sokkanatha !

When shall the fattening of this body stop,
When shall the organs in me snap,
When shall my mind experience full
Silence, O my master, Sokkanatha !

No refuge there is for me,
no one to comfort me
with kind words ; and never anyone
To look up to : O my Master,
Thy feet are my only refuge.

O Sokkanatha, the creator of
The universe, the immaculate one
Of Madurai, who dispels all my grief !
Grant me this boon, that I serve Thee,
And forever and ever think of Thee.

THE TORCH INCIDENT

From then onwards, Jnanasambandhar stayed on at Tiru Arur, wholly effacing himself in the service of his master. One incident in such service requires special mention because of the far-reaching effect it had, not only on Jnanasambandhar but on the Saiva world in general, changing the course of Saiva siddhanta history.

It was the practice of Jnanaprakasar to attend the temple service on the third occasion of public worship in the night (usually called the *ardha-jama-puja*, midnight worship). Jnanasambandhar used to accompany him along with his co-disciples. The service of worship took quite some time and naturally it was dark outside the temple, when Jnanaprakasa returned home. Hence a torch-bearer usually waited with a torch to light the way to Jnanaprakasa's house, which was some way from the temple. One night in particular, Jnanaprakasa sat in the presence of Dakshinamurti in meditative contemplation much longer than usual. When he was coming out from the temple with his followers, it was long past midnight and the torch-bearer had fallen asleep. Such a thing had never happened before and this was perhaps a divine will. The disciple Jnanasambandhar who was closely following on the heels of the master noticed this and found here yet another opportunity to serve his master. He stepped forward quickly, but did not awaken the sleeping torch-bearer as any one in his position would have normally done. He lifted the burning torch, and holding it high, walked in front of his master, as the torch-bearer had done till this night, lighting the way home.*

Jnanaprakasar, who was walking behind, was deeply immersed in the peaceful presence of the Lord he had just now worshipped outwardly, the memory of which

*It should be remembered that a torch-bearer's job is considered to be of a very low order in society, but no such thought entered the mind of Jnanasambandha.

he carried with him inwardly, and so was quite oblivious of all that happened now. He merely walked in the light shed by the torch and followed the torch bearer as usual, and after a few minutes, the party reached his home. 'Stop' he said as usual, and walked into his house. This was the signal for the regular servant to put out his torch and retire, and for the disciples to disperse. The disciples dispersed as usual. But the present torch-bearer, Jnanasambandhar, did not remember the usual practice. His sub-conscious mind was experiencing an inward joy in the service of the master. When the conscious mind heard the order of his master 'stop', he took it merely as an order to him just to stay there. So holding the lighted torch in his hands, he stopped and waited. The other disciples had departed. He did not notice it. Minutes passed ; hours passed ; he knew it not ; he was not aware of his environment. He went apparently into a mystic trance, a *dhyana samadhi*, where the outward senses ceased to function and the mind only was awake in the full enjoyment of an inward peace. All his outward senses converged into his mind. He did not remember himself, his environment, or the torch held in his hands. As though to reveal the spiritual greatness of Jnanasambandha, there was a heavy downpour of rain. Miracle of miracles ! no drop touched him. In time the oil in the torch had burnt itself out ; but the flame was not extinguished ; the torch continued to burn even without oil ! Quite unaware of all these miracles, Jnanasambandha stood

on in the night* even till after daybreak, holding the torch, blissfully happy in an inward peace arising from the thought that he was obeying his master.

Equally so Jnanaprakasa. He finished his food and went to sleep in the normal course. He did not know that his torch-bearer on this night was his own specially favoured new disciple Jnanasambandhar, or that he was then standing outside with a lighted torch in the middle of the night, in pouring rain.

Just at daybreak, the wife of Jnanaprakasar came out of the house to sweep and clean the portals, and draw there the ornamental kolam used in Hindu house holds at dawn. As she opened the gates and came out, she was amazed to find her husband's new disciple standing there, with a lighted torch, untouched by the heavy shower of rain in the night ; the rain had fallen all around, some yards from him, but not a single drop had fallen on him or on the small circular area around him ; even the rain water which had collected and flowed along the street had not touched that area. In

*There is a heroic but also tragic parallel to this incident, not on the spiritual but on the material plane, in the story of a little boy by name Casabianca. His father was captain of a ship and the boy accompanied him on board the ship. There was a sea battle. Before going to the battle, the captain had ordered his son not to move from his place. In the battle, the captain was killed and the ship itself was in flames. The boy was standing in his place obeying the order of his father on the burning deck whence all but he had fled. The fleeing sailors asked him to escape from the ship with them and save himself, but he would not, unless his father called him. Finally the obedient little boy perished in the flames. And English poetess has woven a beautiful lyrical poem out of this incident.

speechless wonder, she ran in and told her husband what she saw.

Jnanaprakasar could hardly believe his ears. He came out and saw Jnanasambandhar, still there, the torch alight in his hand, rain water rushing along the street, but not a drop of water on his person or on the area around him. Now he could hardly believe his eyes. As he was a realised soul, he took in the situation immediately. So, Siva's Grace had enveloped the young man in the night, had kept his torch burning, and had kept the rain water from touching him !

He recalled the dream he had some time back when God had ordered him to take Jnanasambandhar as his disciple and instruct him. With tears of joy and wonder, he embraced Jnanasambandhar the young man, and exclaimed : "My dear Jnanasambandha, you have now been given unparalleled spiritual evolution. You have now grown into a great spiritual master who can shed spiritual lustre and disseminate spiritual knowledge and impart solace to suffering mankind. No longer need you stay with us. You may now go forth, and stay at some suitable place you may like and there propagate the knowledge of God and give spiritual instruction to such mature souls as come under your influence and thus spread the kingdom of God on earth."

Hearing these words, Jnanasambandhar shook with pain at the very thought of separation from his master. He fell at his feet and cried out in agony : "How can I exist when separated from you ?

Does any bull or the load on it
 have a voice in the transport ?
 Can I have a voice in what my body
 or I should do ?
 O my Lord Jnanaprakasa of Arur,
 Say it, thy will be done."

The implication of Jnanasambandhar was that as a servant, he had no independent will except that of acting according to his master's direction.

Jnanaprakasar was very much moved by such words of humility from Jnanasambandhar. He had already seen the hand of Providence in sending the young man all the way from Madurai to Tiru Arur, to be initiated by him. Now he was able to perceive the same hand of God benevolently extended towards him, for the welfare of all humanity. Some divine will seems to have suggested to him the future place and work of Jnanasambandhar. So without hesitation he said :

"Please go north to the celebrated city of Mayuram, two *yojanas** from here. To the north east of that city, you will find a beautiful grove of *vilva* trees. It is known as the *vilvaranya*†. There is in it a small shrine of Siva, called Dharmapuram. In times of yore, Siva bestowed here His grace on Dharmaraja,

*Two *yojanas*—a distance of about twentyfive miles.

† *Vilvaranya*—forest of *vilva* trees; *vilva* is bontanically the *aegle marmelos* (bael).

the god of Death, and hence its name. It is a place made holy by the worship of many sages like Agastya. Let that place be your future seat, from which you may hereafter spread your message of Saiva Siddhanta and help struggling souls to secure final release from all earthly bonds and attain union with God."

Jnanasambandhar, who had wholly surrendered himself to the will of his master, could not now demur. So before agreeing, he asked him : "When am I to have a vision of you again, my master ?" Jnanaprakasar answered, "You may go over here every *Guruvara* (Thursday, the day of the planet Jupiter, Guru)." Jnanasambandhar had to be satisfied with this permission. So now he wrenched himself as it were from the presence of Jnanaprakasar and left Tiru Arur. Visiting the many important shrines such as Tiru Vanchiyam on the way, he reached Dharma-puram in due time.

DHARMAPURAM

Dharmapuram takes its name from Dharmaraja the God of Death, known also as Yama—in all Hinduism. His duty is to seize the souls at the end of their allotted span of life on earth and reward or punish them according to the nature of their action here. Markkandeya was a brahmin boy, destined to die at the age of sixteen. But to overcome death, he was performing *Siva puja* in a place called Tiruk Kadavur. When his allotted span of sixteen years was over, Yama sent his messengers to seize the soul of the boy. But they were repulsed by the forces of Siva, who had appeared before him to take his soul to Kailas, the abode of Siva, on that day. Yama immediately hurried to the place. When he went to Markkandeya he found the boy performing *puja* to Siva. But Yama would not wait even for the *puja* to be completed. In his impatience and conceit, he cast his noose around Markkandeya. But it fell on Markkandeya and the Sivalinga he was worshipping and enveloped them both. When the Lord felt the noose, He came out of the Linga in order to protect his devotee and kicked Yama to death.

There is a subtle point in the general concept of Yama's trying to seize the soul of the young boy.

Markkandeya was a worshipper of Siva, and on his death he had to be taken charge of only by Siva's forces and not by Yama's forces. Here Yama had transgressed his powers and hence his punishment by Siva.

But when Yama prayed for forgiveness, Siva relented ; in order that the function of Yama should proceed unhindered on earth, he directed him to go to Dharmapuram, offer worship and then resume his duties. Yama accordingly did so. The place where he worshipped was thenceforth known as Dharmapuram. Forgiveness was granted to him in this place.

The duty of taking away the souls of all beings for judgement, after the allotted span of life was given to Yama and so he is known as the God of death. Because he is impartial in the discharge of his duty, he is known also as Dharma raja and hence the place where he worshipped is known as Dharmapuram.

The place where Markkandeya worshipped and where Yama was kicked to death is Tiruk-Kadavur situated about ten miles east of Dharmapuram. There is a large and popular temple in the place, where this legend is celebrated in an important festival in the month of April. This temple is also administered by the Dharmapuram Adhinam. The consort of Siva here, given the name Abhirami is the popular deity worshipped by the Saivas.

Dharmapuram takes its name from Dharmaraja the god of Death, known also as Yama. This Dharmapuram is situated a mile to the east of the Mayuranatha shrine of Mayuram, on the southern bank of the river Kaveri.

The legends connected with the Kaveri and its succour to the people of the Chola country are legion. Every inch of the ground here had been sanctified by the tours of the Siva shrines undertaken by the Saiva Acharyas in the seventh and eighth centuries. They had sung the most moving songs in praise of about two hundred Siva shrines there. These songs had inspired the successive emperors of the Chola dynasty, from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries into virtually dotting the land with huge edifices in granite as Siva temples. The Kaveri delta does not have a single hill or a single piece of rock but the Chola rulers had moved whole hillocks to each one of these two hundred places to build a shrine in granite in the place.

The city of Mayuram* houses one such grand temple enshrining Siva as Mayura-natha. Dharmapuram was just a small hamlet in those days, set in very picturesque silvan surroundings, ideal for religious practices and for meditation.

* Mayuram—the place where Sakti in the form of a peacock worshipped Siva; *mayura*—peacock.

Arriving here, Jnanasambandhar worshipped Dharma-purisvara and His consort Abhayambika.* In course of time, he raised a small hermitage for his stay, to the west of the temple. Here he installed in a suitable place, Sokkanatha, the Sivalinga which he had received at Madurai and into whose worship he was initiated by Jnanaprakasara at Tiru Arur. He performed due worship to this *murti* complete with all the prescribed agamic rituals. The spiritual peace and divine lustre emanating from him gathered innumerable devotees and followers, all ardent seekers of truth and enlightenment. He initiated them into the Saiva order of religion and philosophy which he had learned from his master and guided them along the path of God. Many are the miracles attributed to him, all performed not through the assertion of the ego, but through the absolute surrender of the ego to the divine will, and through divine intervention. Later on, we shall say a few words about the concept of miracles in that age.

Jnanasambandhar radiated love for all creation. Under his spiritual influence, even animals left off their instinctive animosity and base nature and lived together in peaceful harmony without harming one another. He had settled in a forest of *vilva* trees. Meek animals like the deer and the cow lived without fear from the wild animals like the tiger. Jnanasambandhar's love for God had permeated into such a strata of life also.

* Abhayambika—She who succours those who seek refuge in Her; a name of Sakti.

As times went on, the sages who were looking after the Dharmapurisvara temple there and performing its various pujas, before the arrival of Jnanasambandhar, understood his spiritual eminence. They came to him, taught him many esoteric sciences of which they were masters, and handed over to him for possession and administration the Dharmapurisvara temple, and their own various hermitages. "O Great One, May you live here long, and may you and your descendants administer the temple and its properties to the best advantage of the Saiva peoples." Thus blessing him, they left the place. Jnanasambandhar took over the administration of the temple and arranged for its regular *pūja*, festivals and construction, and renovation work.

Staying at Dharmapuram, Jnanasambandhar went to Tiru Arur every Thursday to salute his master and derive inspiration from him.

Although he had Jnanaprakasar's permission to go and visit him at Tiru Arur every Thursday, he was feeling the pangs of separation, which he had expressed in many of his songs, subsequently added on to the *Jnanaprakasa malai*.

O Jnanaprakasa, the fountain of Mercy,
Whom the sages see daily
to their hearts' delight,
When am I to have a vision of Your
Lotus feet, and feast my mind thereon ?

My master, honey-like !
 You planted your lotus feet on my head
 And made me your slave.
 But now, starved like the partridge
 For the moon beams, I am quite desolate.
 Grant me that I stay in your presence always.

Such was his frame of mind. He had no doubt developed into an enlightened master for a large number of followers, but still he was always yearning to be in the presence of his own *guru*.

Time passed and the end of Jnanaprakasar had come off suddenly and his soul had discarded this mortal coil and gone to eternal rest at the feet of Lord Siva. When Jnanasambandhar went to visit him the next time, Jnanaprakasar was no longer there in flesh and blood. His grief at missing his master was inconsolable, but being a realised soul, he got over it and went about performing his duties as usual. At the *samadhi* of Jnanaprakasar he sang a short poem on him, called the garland of nine gems, *Navaratna malai*. In one of the verses he sings :

“Out of your mercy you had permitted me to go over to you every Thursday and pray. But now you have dropped your mortal coil. Is it proper that you go away without uttering a word to me ? May you deign to speak a word to me now, O Jnanaprakasa !

“I can easily drop this useless body
 and follow you.
 But you decided otherw^yise,
 and I am reluctant to disobey your wish.
 O that I should live
 even after separation from you,
 my Lord Jnanaprakasa !
 “You have crossed the ocean of births
 and reached the shore.
 You have realised fulfilment.
 But you have stopped me here.
 I exist merely through your grace.
 Call me to yourself ;
 Teach me the means of reaching you,
 My Lord Jnanaprakasa !”

At this stage Jnanasambandhar had written many metrical treatises on the various aspects of the Saiva system of philosophy. Coming as he does from a direct line of preceptors from Lord Dakshinamurti Himself, and by virtue of his authorship of a number of books on the *kriya*, *yoga* and *jnana padas* of that system, Jnanasambandhar has an important place in the history of Saiva philosophy.

CHIDAMBARAM

Once Jnanasambandhar went to Chidambaram and worshipped there the cosmic dance of Lord Nataraja. Chidambaram is the holiest of holies for the Saivas with a large ancient shrine housing the Hall of Nataraja's cosmic dance. After worship, he retired to the thousand-pillared hall and composed himself into a state of prolonged meditation. The external world had ceased to exist, and time itself had stopped. Night followed day in orderly succession but it affected him not. Parasakti, as Sivakamasundari, the consort of Lord Nataraja in the Chidambaram shrine, out of Her infinite mercy as the universal Mother, saw the need to aid his body with physical nourishment, and caused the sweet porridge and milk from Her chamber in the temple, offered in worship to Her by the temple priests, to be given to him.

This incident perhaps finds an echo in the songs of Jnanasambandhar collected together as Sivabhogasaram (the Essence of the Experience of God) :

The Grace of the Lord
Who dances in Tillai*—
Where it will lead me,
Where it will place me,
Where it will drop me,—
I know not.

*A different name for Chidambaram

Let me assure you, my heart,
If you are destined to enjoy
Certain things, then that Karma
Will certainly get hold of you and
Feed you that enjoyment.
Hence do not go about
Asking for this or that,
Stay unperturbed, keeping
The Lord of Tillai in you.

Unthinking persons and persons with a devout frame of mind will alike accept tales of miracles as quite real and true. Spiritually minded persons will accept that God's grace can work any miracles. But in the modern sceptical world, things are not so easily accepted. Hence a word about miracles in general may not be out of place here. We are speaking of an age which existed half a millennium ago. Values in life were quite different in those days. Human society set the greatest score on matters of the spirit. Material values were in a sense non-existent. Hundreds of enlightened souls and seers had lived purely on the spiritual plane. Their experience and their functioning were on a plane altogether different from the ordinary. The lay people could not aspire to or understand the experience on that plane, but yet they had the greatest veneration for men of such experience. Measured from the ordinary standards, their existence and experience constituted in most cases what in popular parlance was explained as miracles. When the ordinary people were able to see many spiritually

evolved souls in their own day to day experience, they set the highest regard for their action, although they could not understand them. When these were not able to explain many aspects of their existence in the higher plane with the criteria of their own living on the material plane, they gave such experiences a new name and called them miracles. Thus we may say that the age of Jnanasambandhar was one in which faith in the miracles swayed the minds of the common people ; we need not say anything about the enlightened souls, because they lived that life. It is no wonder therefore that in those ages and in the life of Jnanasambandhar, many miracles are considered to have really occurred.

No apology is therefore needed for giving an account of the miracles which occurred in the lives of our saints and seers. It is not as though they worked the miracles through any conscious exercise of their ego. In every case we are told that miracles occurred through divine intervention, when the saint concerned had made an absolute surrender of himself to the divine will. And again we may not say, however critical or rationalistic we may like to sound, that miracles had not happened. Many of us have seen before our very eyes many little happenings, often brought about by ordinary individuals, which have no explanation in the realm of reason. In like manner we have to take such instances reported, on trust from the highest spiritual authorities ; on that account they do not cease to be true or do not appear exaggerated,

or become mere flights of the imagination, to be ignored.

In the world of sound, many things have been wrought by sound. Orpheus charmed by his harp in the Greek legend, and Saint Anayar charmed by his pipe in the Saiva legend (Periya puranam), sentient and insentient beings. The serpent is charmed by the snake-charmer's pipe even today. These have been wrought by appeal to some physical sense like the sense of hearing only. But what greater effect could be worked by the Spirit, whose divine peace and influence not only affect all the senses, but go far deeper than they, and touch the mind and through it the spirit itself ?

In India in living memory, people had witnessed spiritual miracles performed by saintly souls. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa converted Narendra into a godly way of life and Swami Vivekananda was born. Once more was India placed in its exalted position on the spiritual map of mankind. Still nearer us, Sri Ramana Maharshi had worked miracles with his visitors ; although these were not so spectacular, they were yet miracles of far reaching and lasting effect in the life of the individual.

In this atomic age, when man has landed on the moon, when the universe itself seems to be shrinking, there are highly advanced scientists who feel that all this knowledge is of no avail in understanding the great power which has created an order in all this imponderable immensity, amidst all discord and

difference, chaos and confusion, a harmony and beauty without which life would be impossible. They feel that their science is powerless to unravel the mystery of this order and harmony. The higher science advances, the greater it feels its inability to comprehend the hand of that Power.

These thoughts should be in our mind when we seek to evaluate or question the miracles. Man has conquered the elements, but has not conquered himself ; neither does he attempt to do it, nor does he go along that path. He tries to conquer the celestial bodies, but does not wish well by his neighbour. Into this world, miracles always introduce an element of awe and wonder, and a message of love and peace.

To continue our narrative. We learn from history that there was hectic activity in the field of religion in the sixteenth century in the whole of Tamilnad. All branches of Hinduism were busy founding institutions, writing religious treatises, glorifying temples and temple legends, imparting instruction to followers, and elucidating philosophical doctrines. Saivism had the greatest share in this activity. Enlightened writers had left their impress on religion through their literary activity also. Jnanaprakasara the preceptor of our Jnanasambandhar had himself written many manuals and treatises covering all the different pathways to God-realisation such as the *charya*, *kriya*, *yoga* and *jnana padas*. He had written also many devotional songs and two *sthalapuranas* (glorified legends of a local temple). Many of his disciples were prolific

writers. No wonder his disciple Jnanasambandhar also wrote several treatises and religious manuals.

Amidst such intense activity, it is just possible that occasionally religious doctrines were given a twisted interpretation. Jnanasambandhar naturally could not help being drawn into a dialectical disputation on that account. There was at this time in Chidambaram, a great scholar by name Marai Jnanasambandhar a senior contemporary of our own Jnanasambandhar. He is different from Marai Jnanasambandhar of Kadandai, the third Santana Acharya.) This Marai Jnana had written scores of treatises on the various pathways in Saivism. One of his smaller books was a short treatise named the *Mukti nilai* (state of salvation). On account of one particular position which he had taken in this book in regard to the inherent traits of the soul, he and his book had come in for sharp criticism at the hands of our Jnanasambandhar.

This writer was a senior contemporary of Guru Jnanasambandhar. He was a great scholar in Sanskrit and in Tamil and had written about twenty religious treatises in Tamil and one in Sanskrit also. Not willing to see the ills and the evils prevalent in the world, he is said to have lived blind-folded. He also hailed from the line of disciples in the spiritual line after Saint Umapati and he had besides a number of disciples, some of whom had written religious treatises and commentaries. He had lived in Chidambaram.

Marai Jnana contended that *ananda* or joy was an inherent trait of the soul, just as *sat* and *chit*, being and

knowledge, were also its traits ; that *mala* or ignorance obstructed the realisation of the soul ; that when the obstruction was removed, the soul could enjoy its own bliss ; and that this was the *mukti-nilai*, state of salvation. He was a profound scholar and also an enlightened soul. His own preceptors were men of great veneration in the Saiva world and his line of preceptors had also a great following. Hence our Jnanasambandhar felt that such a doctrine was not correct and was not conducive to the development and final emancipation of the souls. So he wrote another small treatise of twentytwo verses, called *Mukti nischaya*,* the determination of the nature of salvation. Here he established that bliss is not an inherent nature of the soul, the soul had only knowledge and being, that bliss is an attribute of Siva, and not of the soul, and that only when the soul's ignorance or fetters is removed by the grace of Siva, is it able to enjoy *Sivananda* or bliss, which is indeed a bestowal by Siva.

Thus, this little treatise not only gives us an insight into the contemporary currents in Saiva thought, but also gives Jnanasambandhar a definite place in the evolution and development of the philosophical concepts in saivism. Hence his name will live in history not merely as the Founder of the Dharmapuram monastery as we shall see later, but also as one who had advanced the Saiva Siddhanta philosophical concepts and enriched its literature by his expository writings.

*Two commentaries on this text had been written by about 1700 A.D. by Sri Velliambalavana Tambiran, a disciple of Dharmapuram; one is a short gloss and the other is a large exposition.

Jnanasambandhar from then onwards came to be known as *Guru* Jnanasambandhar, to distinguish him from spiritual leaders of the same name, particularly from this Marai Jnanasambandhar his own contemporary. The first person who illumined this name was Saint Tiru Jnanasambandhar the first of the Saiva Samaya acharyas, who lived in the middle of the seventh century at Sikali. Another Jnanasambandhar was Marai Jnanasambandhar of Kadandai (latter half of the fourteenth century) ; he was so called because he was well versed in the Vedas (basic Sanskrit scriptures for all branches of Hinduism). He was the third *acharya* in the line of the Saiva Siddhanta spiritual preceptors from Saint Meikandar. Yet another one was this Marai Jnanasambandhar the author of *Mukti nilai*, refuted by our own Jnanasambandhar. He was a very prolific writer and the Saiva world owes a great debt to him for his many writings such as *Saiva samaya neri* and *Siva Dharmotharam*. To distinguish our Jnanasambandhar from all the above, the term *Guru* was prefixed to his name. This was because he had founded an order of Saivism at Dharmapuram, created a monastery there, and was himself the first preceptor, *Guru*, therein, imparting instruction (upadesa) to evolved souls and disciples.

SAMADHI

Guru Jnanasambandhar continued to live in this manner at Dharmapuram for a long time. His spiritual attainments attracted to Dharmapuram a large number of seekers after truth, from far and near. His was a life of absolute surrender to God, radiating peace and love to all creation, and helping mature and deserving souls in their onward march toward the final blissful union with God. Finally, he realised that the day of his final union with Siva was approaching. He decided to go into his eternal *samadhi* at the feet of the *Sivalinga* installed by him there. But other things had to be arranged for. His guru Jnanaprakasar had enjoined him to foster the cause of Saiva Siddhanta by instituting a spiritual headship here. The daily worship of Sokkanatha had to be performed. Besides, there was the administration of the local Dharmapurisvara temple which he had taken over from the sages. Many disciples in various stages of enlightenment had gathered round him and were living there ; they had to be helped further along the spiritual path by a spiritual head. Hence he felt the necessity for installing a spiritual successor to look after these several needs and interests.

He selected from among his followers Anandapavasa (literally one who is beside himself with

ananda) as the most spiritually evolved person and as the best fitted to assume the headship of the Dharma-puram *jnanapeeta* (spiritual seat), imparted to him the Supreme knowledge of God. "May you occupy our seat of spiritual headship here, guide deserving souls, perform worship for Sokkanatha and the other temples, and propagate the doctrines of Saiva Siddhanta", he told him. Immediately he anointed him, consecrated him with due rituals and installed him as his successor to the seat. Then he entered into a *jeeva samadhi*.

But Anandaparavasa, who was in reality more highly evolved than the occasion demanded, seems to have already set his heart on total release and oneness with God. So, when he had the final initiation from his master, other things of the world did not matter to him, temple worship or guidance to deserving human souls did not matter. When Jnanasambandhar passed into a *samadhi*, Ananda cared no more for existence in this world. He prostrated before the *samadhi*, went and stayed at a spot to the west of it, and, in full view of the crown of the temple *vimana* of his master, himself passed into an eternal *samadhi*. His soul, like a bird released from its cage, entered into the most cherished and eternal non-dual union with Siva.

But this was not what Jnanasambandhar had planned, or what his followers had desired. They required a spiritual leader to guide them. So they now gathered at the *samadhi* of Jnanasambandhar and prayed : "O Lord, now that Anandaparavasa your nominee has also entered eternal bliss, what is to become of

us ? We pray, you appear again to help us, and to ensure a proper succession to the headship of Dharma-puram, and name a competent spiritual *guru* for us." Through the dispensation of Divine Grace, Jnanasambandhar then came out of his *samadhi*, chose Satchitananda another disciple as the next successor, initiated him, anointed him as the next successor and future head, and gave into his hands the worship of Sokkathana.

But it transpired that Satchitananda had not the requisite maturity and enlightenment. He was not immediately able to go into a state of *jnana samadhi*, the state of complete identification of the consciousness with God. This naturally caused some concern to Jnanasambandhar. He again bestowed his gracious look on Satchitananda and said :

Alas ! even after perceiving
 The state of Life, Light and Joy into which
 Anandaparavasa has merged —
 A state which glows without a beginning,
 A middle or an end, oneness has not
 Dawned on you. Is it from attachment,
 Or because the bonds, *anava*, *karma*
 And *maya* have not yet got annulled ?
 Has not the Supreme Knowledge
 dawned on you ?
 Tell us, how is your vision so clouded ?

These words of the master produced the desired result. Satchitananda realised the state of *jnana samadhi*. Jnanasambandhar was now happy. He

instructed him again to assume the spiritual headship of the Dharmapuram seat, to perform the various worships in the temples, and spread the knowledge of the Saiva Siddhanta doctrines among the disciples and in the wider world. Then he entered into his final *samadhi* of eternal non-dual union with Siva, on the seventh day of the dark fortnight of the month of *Vaikasi* (May-June).

Thus Satchitananda was the third pontiff of the place, which has since come to be known as the Dharmapuram Adhinam. An unbroken line of enlightened preceptors adorned the headship from the days of Guru Jnanasambandhar right up to this day.

The present head of the Dharmapuram mutt is His Holiness Sri Shanmukha Desika Jnanasambandha Paramacharya, twentysixth in the holy line from Guru Jnanasambandhar.

The *samadhi* of Jnanasambandhar had subsequently been built up into a grand temple in granite and it is now called the Sri Jnanapurisvara temple. It has all the usual courtyards, corridors, halls and sub-temples, usually associated with a Siva temple proper. Daily, periodical and seasonal worship and festivals are conducted in the temple as laid down in the agamas. The belief is that Guru Jnanasambandhar still dwells in this temple and continues to guide the successive heads of the Adhinam.



THE ADHINAM

Such in brief is the story of Guru Jnanasambandhar, the enlightened founder of the Dharmapuram Adhinam, his writings and his founding of the institution. In the long line of successors to the headship of the adhinam, there have been many enlightened seers who advanced the Saiva faith by their example, precept, writing and administration.

A few words may be said of some of the illustrious preceptors in the line. The fourth was Masilamani desika from whom Kumaragurupara of Sri Vaikuntam received spiritual instruction. Kumaragurupara went up to Banaras in the north, mastered the Hindustani language, and won the admiration of the Muslim deputy of the Delhi Mughal emperor through his masterly religious discourses in that language. He founded in Banaras the Kumaraswami mutt on the banks of the Ganges, which is still flourishing. Besides, Kumara gurupara is one of the most famous popular figures in the Tamil literary history of the seventeenth century. He lived in the days of Tirumalai Nayak, ruler of Madurai till 1659. He has written eleven poems of exquisite literary beauty. One of the poems is in praise of his guru, Mailamani desika of Dharmapuram, mentioned above. The Kumaraswami mutt founded

by him at Banaras was shifted to Tiruppanandal in the next century and it is still flourishing there performing a number of religious charities and serving the cause of the Saiva religion and Tamil literature. The sixth in the line was Tiru Jnanasambanda desika who imparted instruction to Sambandha Saranalaya, author of the famous shorter *Skandapurana* in Tamil. Legends say that the ruler of Mysore admired him and gave him many presents. The next was Tiru Ambala Desika, who wrote the Sanskrit manual, *Varnasrama chandrika*, intended to inform the ruler of the land that spiritual preceptors transcended the Vedic caste barriers. In the days of this acharya, the Tanjavur Mahratta ruler passing by tried to pull down the Jnanapurisvara temple under instigation from unbelievers who said that this was only a *sudra samadhi* which did not demand respect, but the miracles that happened here at the time restored the ruler to his senses and to compensate for his rash decision, he made an endowment of lands for the midnight puja in the Temple. This was the occasion for the acharya's writing his Sanskrit treatise emphasizing the right of the other *varnas* too to take to the *sannyasi* order because of their own advancement. Padikkasu, famous as a versatile poet in the eighteenth century, was a disciple under the ninth pontiff Tirunavukkarasu desika. The tenth in the line was Sivajnana desika, who made a pilgrimage to Banaras and there sang several devotional hymns on the deities enshrined in the Kasi Viswanatha temple and the other temples there.

The present head of the Dharmapuram mutt is His

Holiness Sri Shanmukha Desika Paramacharya, twenty-sixth in the holy line from Guru Jnanasambandhar. He is an erudite scholar in the Tamil language and literature, as well as in the Saiva Siddhanta sastras and religious books with a capacity for a fine perceptive elucidation of religious texts. Having been in charge of the Dharma-puram religious centre at Madras for a large number of years, he has been widely known in the Tamil country and beyond. Both by his deep learning and austere habits, and by his pleasing words, he has endeared himself to all the Saivas and the others in the land and earned their love and reverence.

It is noteworthy that some important temples in the Tamilnad continue to be administered by the Dharma-puram Adhinam even today. The spiritual eminence of the successive heads of the Adhinam after Guru Jnanasambandhar was having greater and greater recognition. As years rolled by, devout people all over the Tamilnad had been drawn to the monastery by the spritual illumination imparted by the successive heads. The heads were by rule required to be celibate ascetics and so people from many places seem to have felt that the temples in their own places would be better administered and maintained by the heads of the Adhinam who were selfless and dedicated ascetics and spiritually evolved *jnanis*. Thus twentyseven temples had been transferred to the Adhinam by people around the area in the belief that administration by such spiritual minded persons would be to the advantage

of the Saiva community at large. We shall mention here some of the more important of them.

Saint Jnanasambandhar, the first samaya acharya of the Saivas, was born in Sikali and he attained beatitude in a place called Nallurpperumanam (now called Achalpuram). It is remarkable that the shrines in these two places, Sikali and Nallurpperumanam are now being administered by the Dharmapuram Adhinam, whose founder we know was another Jnanasambandhar. Tiru Aiyaru, where Saint Appar was vouchsafed a vision of Kailas, is also under this Adhinam. Of the eight shrines famed in legend as the places where the might of Lord Siva came into display, namely the *Ashta-viratta* shrines, three are administered by this Adhinam ; Tiru Kadavur where the fear of Yama the god of death was removed (vide pages 57-8). Tiru Korukkai where the power of Kama the Indian Cupid was destroyed, and Tiru Pariyalur where the might of Daksha who slighted Siva was vanquished. Vaidhisvarankoil famed in the Tanjavur district for its Subramanya shrine, where the eagles Sampati and Jatayu of the Ramayana fame worshipped, the Tiruppanandal temple where Lord Siva inclined His head to receive a floral wreath from a young girl, and the Tiru Nallaru temple which is held specially important to Sani (Saturn) the planet which is said to exercise a baneful influence on the human beings, are some of the other temples administered by the Adhinam. The large temple at Tirubhuvanam in the Tanjavur district built by the Chola emperor Kulothunga III is also

under this Adhinam ; this is dedicated to Sri Sarabhamurti, a mystical form of Siva, half animal and half bird, who manifested himself in order to calm down the ferocity of Narasimhamurti, the *avatara* of Lord Vishnu, after he killed the Asura King, Hiranyakasipu.

The other temples are minor and major ones with varying degrees of importance.

The Adhinam has been publishing the Saiva canonical books, the Saiva sastras, manuals written by its own heads and disciples, and other literature, holding religious and literary classes, discourses and conferences and has thus been helping the development of the Saiva religion and Tamil literature.

THE WORKS OF GURU JNANA SAMBANDHAR

Guru Jnanasambandhar is considered to have written eight small poems in Tamil. All of them have been printed. We shall briefly notice them here.

Sokkanathak-kalitturai is the first poem sung by him. The occasion was his finding the Sivalinga in the golden lotus tank of Madurai, under Siva's direction given to him in a dream. The poem contains 11 verses in praise of Lord Sokkanatha (Somasundara, the presiding Deity in the modern Minakshi Temple) of Madurai, in the *kalitturai*, metre. Here he bemoans his own unfitness and extolls the Lord's boundless mercy, in condescending to bestow His grace on an worthy person like himself.

Jnanaprakasa malai (also called *Pandarak-kalitturai*) is the next. Part of this poem was sung by him when he was initiated into the personal ritualistic worship of Sokkalingam by his preceptor Kamalai-Jnanaprakasar; part of it consists of verses sung by Jnanasambandhar on various occasions later and added on to the original text. The poem is in praise of Jnanaprakasar and contains 35 verses, also in the *kalitturai* metre. Here he says that it is the Supreme Lord Himself who came to him in the form of Jnanaprakasar and declares that he has no independent existence except the one of serving his master.

Sokkanatha venba was sung on Lord Sokkanatha when he was taught the worship of Sokkalingam by

his master. This contains now 100 verses in the *venba* metre in praise of that *murti* (*lingam*). Some of the verses are said to have been sung by him during his daily worship of Sokkanatha; the available verses had been added to the original poem later on. The poem contains some very subtle thoughts of the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy, couched in the most simple but forceful language.

Navaratna malai is a short poem of nine verses sung by Jnanasambandhar, when his guru Jnana-prakasar had taken eternal rest at the feet of the Lord. (*Navaratna*-nine gems.) This is also in the *kalitturai* metre.

Dasa karya ahaval is a highly technical poem of three verses in the *asiriyappa* metre, containing in all 136 lines. This deals with the ten stages of realisation in regard to the three entities-*pasa* (bonds), *pasu* (the soul) and *Pati* (God); it is naturally bound to be obscure to the novice. The *dasa karyas* (ten stages) are *tattva rupam*, *tattva darsanam*, *tattva suddhi*; *atma rupam*, *atma darsanam*, *atma suddhi*; *Siva rupam*, *Siva darsanam*, *Siva yogam* and *Siva bhogam*.

Praasaada shadgam is a poem of seven verses in the long *viruttam* metre and is a translation of Sanskrit text of the same name. *Praasaada* is a peculiar *yoga* path, which is special to Saiva Siddhanta and probably also to the Dharmapuram school. Kamalai Jnana-prakasar the guru of Guru Jnanasambandhar had himself written a treatise on this subject known as

Praasaada malai. This yoga consists of taking the soul through the sixteen stages called *kalas* and of attaining final union with God at the end of the *kala* experience.

The Yoga sastras speak in detail about the *ashtanga yoga* consisting of the eight steps—*yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *prana-yama*, *pratyahara*, *dharanai*, *dhyanam* and *samadhi*. But these only form the preliminary steps of a personal discipline for the *prasada yoga* which takes the soul through the sixteen stages or *prasada kalas* and ultimately helps the soul to attain the final union. The sixteen *kalas* are termed *medha (akara)*, *arghisa (ukara)*, *visha (makara)*, *bindu*, *ardhachandra*, *nirodhini*, *nada*, *nadanta*, *sakti*, *vyapini*, *samana*, *unmana*; these constitute the *dva dasakala prasada Yoga* with twelve *kalas*. However, four more steps or *kalas* are mentioned between the two stages of *vyapini* and *samana* and they are termed *vyoma-rupini*, *ananta*, *anata*, and *anasrita*; the full number of sixteen is the *shodasa kala (16 kala) prasada yoga* of Saiva Siddhanta. The text describes many features relative to the sixteen *kalas* such as colour or lustre, area, provision, form, deity, the *malas* (affecting the purity of the soul) and concludes with each *kala*, *matra* (a period of time) and *sunya (abhava)* in the process. This was then developed as an elaborate process of yogic exercises which were practised by the novices in the Dharmapuram Adhinam and even today there is an exercise chamber in his monastery called the 16 *Odukkam* where the exercise of the

praasaada yoga was practised under the expert guidance of the master. Of course in the modern day the subject is very obscure and there is today no teacher who could instruct any one in this secret yogic path.

Mukti nischayam has been described in the text (*vide page 70*). It is a poem of 22 verses in the *venba* metre. It is a refutation of the concept of *mukti* as stated by Marai Jnanasambandhar. Two commentaries on the book had been written by 1700 A.D. by Sri Velliambalavana Tambiran, a disciple of Dharmapuram; one is short gloss and the other is a large exposition, with endless quotations from the agamas and other Sanskrit texts.

Siva bhoga saram is the most famous and popular of the writings of the author. Several editions of the book have been published in the last century, by persons unconnected with Dharmapuram. This would indicate that the book had been popular with a wider Tamil world for quite a long period. The term *Siva bhoga saram* signifies that it is the expression of the essence of God-experience.

The *Sivabhogasaram* along with the earlier *Jnana-prakasa malai* lays a special emphasis on the need for a spiritual preceptor (*guru*). This emphasis was already there in the Saiva canon. *Tiru mantram* speaks of it very elaborately. We know Saint Manikkavacakar had his initiation under Siva Himself, who came down as his guru. Scriptures say that Siva himself comes down on earth in human form as the

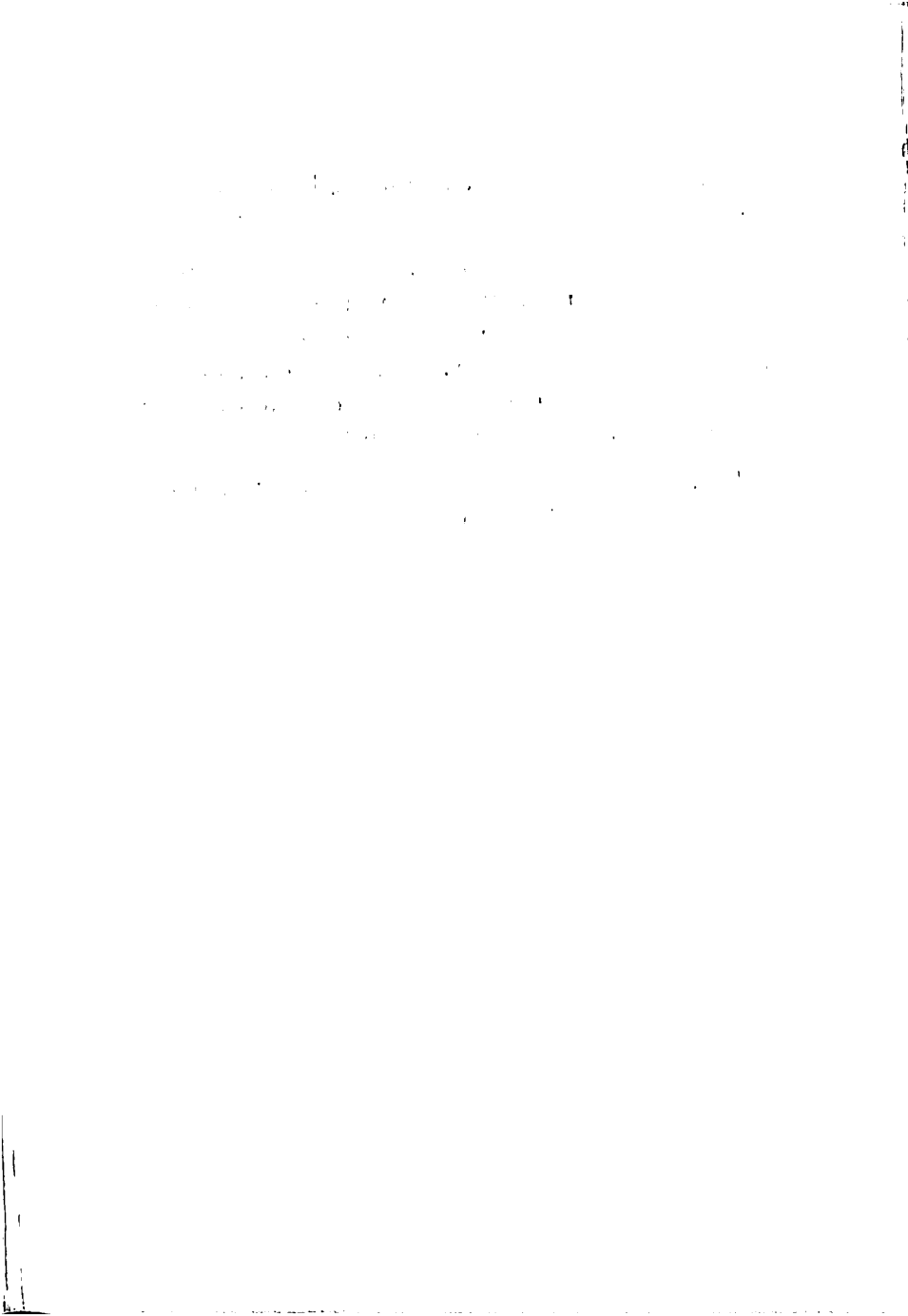
guru for the least evolved souls, the *sakalas*. Guru Jnanasambandhar in all his writings, particularly in these two books, re-states the concept of the *guru*. It is but fitting therefore that he himself was asked by his own *guru* to be the head of a line of spiritual preceptors, for a long time to come. The present poem consists of 131 verses in the *venba* metre. It is the outcome of the author's experience of a blissful union with God, where he had severed all the bonds and had immersed himself in the ocean of eternal bliss; a bliss conferred by God and experienced by him. It is rare for a realised soul to pour forth its God-experience in words, but Guru Jnanasambandhar has perhaps done this because he had undertaken the task of founding a holy order at Dharmapuram, and taken upon himself the responsibility to evolve a line of spiritual preceptors for the guidance of all mankind.

Jnanabharana vilakkam is an ambitious work on the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy, expository and dialectical in character. Here he had taken the *Sivajnana siddhi* of Arulnandi sivam (the second of the *santana acharyas*), the scripture following which spiritual instruction was imparted to him by his guru and elaborated it by interweaving new verses into the text. It should have been a very large treatise, but unfortunately, except for a few fragments, the entire work seems to have been lost. It had the benefit of an elaborate gloss from Velliambalavana Tambiran, a learned disciple of the fourth pontiff of the Adhinam;

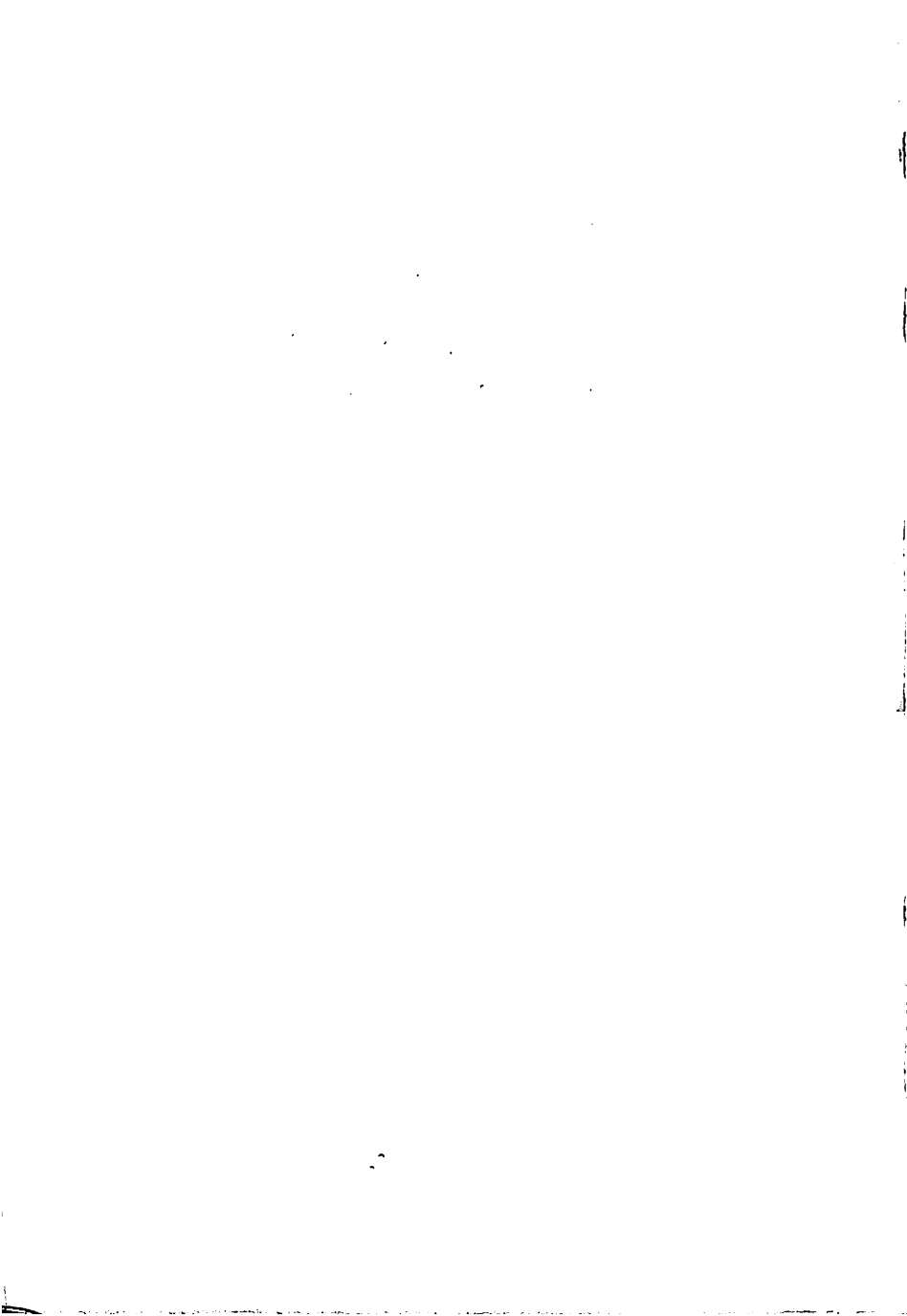
only part of the gloss is available and this has been published.

The gloss quotes many pages at a stretch from Sastras in Sanskrit on the Saiva Siddhanta system, but unfortunately all those Sastras seem to have been lost. These incidentally would indicate the high degree of Sanskrit scholarship among the followers of the Dharmapuram mutt.

All the above books, to the extent available, have been published by the Adhinam.



SECTION 3
GURU JNANASAMBANDHAR
IN HIS OWN WORDS



SAYINGS OF GURU JNANASAMBANDHAR

Guru Jnanasambandhar has sung in all 331 verses in the eight poems mentioned in the previous section. Ten verses in the *Dasakarya ahaval* and the *Prasada shadgam* are fully metaphysical and mystical in import. Excluding these, the other verses, numbering about 321, contain some fine devotional and religious thoughts in the Tamil language. Often there is no clear dividing line between emotional outburst and philosophical expression. A vein of supplication to the guru and through him an absolute surrender to the Supreme Will runs through all the poems. The author had felt the guidance of the Divine Hand early in his spiritual career and this influence is clearly discernible in all his sayings. He belongs to the small group of world teachers raised to lofty heights of spiritual experience early in life by the visitation of God. He stands out as a unique figure, not only by the visitation of God, but by his coming in a great spiritual line in Tamilnad, handing down the rich and ancient legacy of Saiva Siddhanta, by his many songs of prayer and philosophy, and also by his founding a spiritual line of instruction through his disciples. Some of the lines in his songs have passed into the lore of proverbs in Tamil and this will indicate

the popularity which his songs have had among the Saiva peoples in the land, in the past centuries.

In the following pages are given the sayings of Saint Guru Jnanasambandhar in his own words, rendered into the English language. His songs are simple and quite lucid; although all of them can be given, we give here only about a hundred verses taken from six poems, arranged subject wise.

ON HIMSELF

(The references by Guru Jnanasambandhar to himself given in the verses below are couched in the traditional language of an enlightened soul taking upon himself all the evils of the world.)

My thoughts are deceitful,
My words are false, and
My deeds are ever fraudulent:
If Thou directest the three organs
In this manner, O Sokkanatha,
When am I to obtain release ?
I have not yet got rid of
delusion and desire fully ;
And love of the physical body
I have not yet overcome ;
Alas ! the bonds have not yet snapped
even after I had attained you,
O Lord Sokkanatha of Madurai !
I am not a fervent devotee,
Nor am I impeccable ;
A covetous person I am,
devoid of the least love.
But, my Lord Sokkanatha,
Shower on me Thy Infinite mercy,

Cause me to see myself,
Cause me to realise Thee
And nurture me in the cradle of joy.

Not the least love for Thee
Do I possess ; yet
Daily do I utter Thy name
Before Godly men and say
Thou art my only refuge
And that I am Thy servant.
In Thine infinite mercy,
Forgive me this falsehood,
O my mother, Jnanaprakasa.

Penances, little do I know,
But evils I do on earth
Are limitless. How am I
To attain union with Siva,
How will my bonds snap ?
O my Lord Sokkanatha ?

My mind does not dwell on
Devotion, nor does it abhor
The desire for the eight siddhis—
It does not stand firm on moksha,
O my Lord Sokkanatha.

Thou dost not give up desires,
Thou dost not give up passions,
Thou dost not perform Siva pooja,
Thou dost not meditate with love,
On the five letters of Siva,

Thou hast not conquered anger,
Thou dost not chant the hymns ;
Oh my mind ! Fie upon you !
With what face can you talk ?

ON GOD

Jnanasambandhar was a fully realised soul. His stay at Dharmapuram was under the orders of his master, and for the welfare of humanity. From the moment Jnanaprakasar instructed Jnanasambandhar the latter was experiencing an unceasing torrent of joyous God-experience. Experience of bliss is always beyond words. Occasionally we get an insight into it in Jnanasambandhar's words.

My Lord Sokkanatha,
Thou dost not abide in those
Who are one with matter and with the ego.
But abidest as the Supreme Bliss itself
In the hearts of those
Who get immersed in that Bliss.

We enjoy the abundance of Siva.
United in the All-pervasive
We exist everywhere,
And not merely in the material world.
We exist without an end
We bow at the feet of the great sages
Who have realised Siva :
Who is our equal ?

If the Lord who is All Bliss and All Intelligence,
Himself pervades everything, matter and sentient
beings, who then is great and who is small, who is a
friend and who a foe ?

Could I realise Thee through my own effort,
Then, would I remain in this misery
Thus long, O Sokkanatha of Madurai ?

My heart dwells on naught else
But Thee, O Lord. But yet,
Thou has not thought fit to dispel
The darkness lurking in me. I have not
Apparently performed the least of penances.
What exactly is missing in my effort
To attain you, my Lord Sokkanatha ?

Who is so fortunate as I ?
Thou didst appear before me, and
Taught me the real sense
of the Upanishads, the crown of the Vedas
Rare to comprehend by any,
O Lord Sokkanatha !

(Sokkanatha is called the Siddha who can perform
any miracle. The author in a lighter vein questions
this title and himself supplies the answer.

My Lord of Madurai, Thou wouldst bless only
those who Love Thee, but not those who are hard-
hearted. How then art Thou called the All-Powerful
Siddha ?

But now I know ; none there is hard bound in bondage as myself ; but yet, Thou hast accepted this loveless me also as Thy slave. Thou art indeed the All-Powerful Siddha, O blissful Lord of Madurai.

Thou art the perfection that gathers
Over the clouds of knowing and joy,
Where desires die out,
Darkness vanishes, and
The body itself melts away,
O Lord Sokkanatha.

Those who overcome their desires get over their limited knowledge, and their own great attainments, and forget the self and are able to stay in the state of eternal bliss, without any consciousness of the physical body : who can equal them ?

ON HIS GRACE

It is the heat that scalds,
and not the iron.

It is Thy glorious Grace that
allots the gods their functions,
O Lord Sokkanatha, the immutable.

Thou art the treasure house of mercy,
the blessed for some of

Thine devotees,
Thou art the pleasurable joy
Ever present in my intellect,
O Lord Sokkanatha.

How hast thou entered my mind, melting my
heart, consuming my body, and causing a flood of
joy to overflow, and reveal the bonds as unreal !

Whatever I may do,
Whatever I may say,
Whatever I may contemplate,
When through Thy grace I realise
That everything is Thine own work,
Then my Lord, mine I perceive not.

Ere I was able perceive
The ineffable grace of the Lord,
I sought for His feet everywhere

And grew weary, not realising
I was resting at the feet all the time.

Studying millions of scriptures, and attaining great
powers through various penances will not confer
peace of the soul to those who cannot stay by the
Grace of the Guru unperturbed.

Wilt Thy Grace unite me with
The Sages following the godly path,
And make me also tread the path
Of Virtue, Oh Sokkanatha
Of Madurai, who reduced to ashes
The three Fortresses that did evil ?

ON HIS GURU

(In Saivism, as in every other branch of Hinduism, the spiritual preceptor is considered as the manifest form of the Supreme Being. Out of Its infinite mercy, that Being had taken the form of Kamalai Jnanaprakasar in order to redeem Guru Jnanasambandhar and through him humanity at large.)

He is the Supreme Lord, my Master,
Jnanaprakasa of Kamalai
The dispenser of success and of love,
Of knowledge to perceive the Truth,
And He the bestower of bliss.

Jnanaprakasar the transcendant Lord has now hoisted the banner of redemption : why worry and suffer ? Ignore the false guidance of the others, and hasten to the presence of his lotus feet.

They, that bow at the feet
of Jnanaprakasa, have no fear of death ;
the creator does not give them future births.
Hence, have no fear,
you can live happy
and be enveloped in bliss.

I perceived Jnanaprakasa of Kamalai
whose bower drips honey-

Him with the golden lotus feet.
 My bonds fell off,
 And nectar I drank,
 Immersed in blissful ecstasy.

Need you perform penances
 by standing on the top of hills
 in the hot sun ?

Jnanaprakasa redeems his devotees
 whoever they be. Therefore,
 call yourselves his servants :
 that is enough to remove your births.

Ethical conduct who shall know,
 And realisation and release,
 The path of penances and of love
 Who shall follow, had not
 Jnanaprakasa the Supreme Lord
 Come to us in human form ?

Just as hard earth is levelled,
 weeded, made soft
 and sown with sweet paddy,
 so also the grace of Jnanaprakasa
 softened my hard intellect,
 taught me in a relishable manner
 the nature of the bonds,
 the nature of grace,
 and the nature of perfect bliss.

The feet of Jnanaprakasa are to me
 my father and mother, my kin,
 the object of my enjoyment,

the external world, my body and
my mind, and my soul's soul.

When I understood the teaching of Jnanaprakasara,
I perceived that all else was mere delusion. I merged
into his ocean of bliss, and retained the feeling of
bliss in my heart, without any consciousness thereof :
I became that bliss : this is indeed perfect release.

The fragrant feet* of Jnanaprakasa
bestows a flood of joy on those
that show even a little devotion to him :
but those deceitful persons who have no love
and who think one thing and do another,
they consign to lowly births.

We care not who hates us,
Or who jeers at us :
Jnanaprakasara dwells in our heart
And showers therein a blissful experience.
We can have no more births,
And our joy will be eternal.

The true followers of Jnanaprakasara study the nature
of the three entities in Saivism—*Pati, pasu* and *pasam* ;
after realising them, they spurn all this worldly life :
they cease from the worries of learning ; and finally
they immerse themselves in the ocean of bliss of
Siva, in a non-dual union.

*'feet' is always symbolic of God's grace.

ON HIS INSTRUCTION

(The spiritual instruction imparted by Jnanapra-kasar had evolved Jnanasambandhar into a spiritual leader. All his songs reveal the influence of the master. Some of the direct references to the master's advice are collected below.)

If thou wouldst reach the Supreme
Whom the mind reaches not,
Stay firm in the state where
The day or the night exist not ;
Repudiate all that is perceived,
As not this and not this, and
Rid yourself of the three bonds-
So taught my master.

I am the intelligence, and
The joy arising therein is Siva.
That which obscures me from perceiving
My own nature, is the bondage.
They are the liberated,
who realise this state,
So taught my master.

The relationship of mother, father and kin is all a delusion. Thou didst consider thy body as thyself. Now hast thou realised that all this is mere delusion and that the supreme bliss is the only real.

When the lips utter fire, does it burn ?
 When the lips say butter, milk,
 honey or sugar

Do the lips taste sweet ?
 Therefore, if you just say I am Brahman,
 Do you become Brahman ?
 Realise the Brahman in you,
 Through the grace of the master.

I pervade thine intelligence and exist as thee. If
 thou canst merge thyself in me for ever and remain
 as I, then there is nothing more to be done for ending
 thy cycle of births.

Where vanity, evil thought arrogance, anger, attachment, and desire are not overcome, it is indeed hard, very hard to lose oneself in eternal union with God's Grace.

Discarding vanity, getting over the limited knowledge of the soul, renouncing this world whose existence is just like a flash of lightning, despising the physical body, and uniting with Siva if this could be achieved—that is the day when the cycle of births ceases.

Can you perceive by crying hoarse
 With your throat, day and night,
 Oh my timid and foolish heart,
 The Supreme Unknown ?

The Truth may be taught only to those in whom great love has evolved, preception has dawned thereon, and where there is the will to wipe out painful *karma* and the thirst for realising perfect bliss.

ON KARMA

(Every soul that is born performs some action. In accordance with the attachment of the soul to the action, *karma* or fruits of action accrue. No one can escape this cycle of action and *karma*. God links *karma* to the respective souls, through successive births. The enlightened man ceases to get attached to the action, but imagines it is all God's will.)

If it is really God who through His grace, causes each to act according to his own *karma*, why then do you judge others as the good or the bad? O my heart, consider everything as God's will.

The Lord binds with the threads of *karma*, this body which is like a wooden doll, and makes it perform good and bad acts. O the absurdness of the ignorant people who do not realise this but call it their own work !

The Lord knows what *karma* is to be linked, to whom, at what place and time, in what manner, and through what agency. Knowing this, He does link the particular *karma* at the particular time and place, through the particular means and manner without the least omission.

Canst Thou not in your infinite mercy,
 Bestow bliss
 On my intelligence, my Lord ?
 Why should Thou slowly make me suffer
 Mortify me through evil *karma*
 And then bestow realisation on me ?

The body and its ailments,
 And the good and the bad,
 Do they, attach themselves to us,
 Without any cause ?

Siva's grace relates them to us,
 In accordance with our action in the past
 Know this and set your heart on Him.

Uniting the body to you,
 And separating it from you,
 Making you act and then cease,
 Enlightening you and obscuring you,
 Remember, all these accord
 With pre-ordained *karma*.

People are born, each according to his *karma*.
 People derive experience each according to his *karma*.
 Who has helped whom and who has not ? The sages
 always think of Knowing themselves.

Day dawns when the hours of darkness are over,
 and night closes in when the hours of the day are
 over. Realize this, O my heart. When the time is
 ripe, all actions bear fruit ; and when the time is not,
 they simply become void.

The bonds are insentient ;
The soul will not cling by itself to the bonds,
Thou linkest the two, my Lord,
And dost start the cycle.
But if Thou dost not redeem the soul,
How then can the soul get released ?

ON THE MEANS

What does it signify
if the whole world
Waits for our favour ?
What does it signify
if the whole world is ours,
If the whole world extolls us ?
We can attain salvation
Only if we cut asunder
The cluster of *karmas*,
And delight in the enjoyment of bliss.

Tell me when will the births stop ?
Will they stop if you are infatuated
With knowledge or
if you are inseparably one
With the Supreme Bliss, which is
Beyond your perceptin and
beyond any definition ?

Any amount of learning,
any amount of instruction,
and any amount of achievement
will not bring joy, when
all this wordly life appears real,
and fails to manifest its unreal nature.

To the sages that have overcome delusion, the body is a thing to be discarded. To them the Almighty is the only refuge.

I may pray to Thee for anything,
Only if Thy grace does not stand by me.
But since Thou art with me always,
And directest me, how am I the doer
Either for good or for bad ?

What use bathing, what use
Worshipping with flowers ?
What avail visiting shrines ?
Only the firm hold of the heart
Will help the soul to attain Thy Feet.

ON PHILOSOPHY

Do not worry about the real principles in
in metaphysics.

Let me tell you what they are :

They are the expressions of *maya*,
Which are responsible to hold you
From identifying yourself with Siva,
The source of all joy.

Oh my master, that delights in giving !

If the Soul has joy as its inherent faith, will it pass
through the endless births and deaths ? If the eyes
have the lustre of the sun, will they not be able to see
through darkness ?

It is false to say that, apart from the supreme joy
existing in God, there is also joy inherent in the
soul ; the only joy the soul can have is a realisation of
the joy in God ; there is nothing else but the darkness
of ignorance.

The state of salvation according to the Siddhanta
as defined in the Agamas is the release from the
inherent bonds and the merging in the bliss of Siva.

The bonds are insentient ;

The soul will not cling by itself to the bonds,

Thou linkest the two, my Lord,
 And dost start the cycle.
 But if Thou dost not redeem the soul,
 How then can the soul get release ?
 Where words fail and thoughts stop,
 Where the veil of *maya* is removed,
 There will dawn realisation of the Self.
 It is a myth to say reading scriptures
 Mountain high, praising with the lips
 And worshipping through action,
 Will take us to Him.

Like the fire in the wood
 And heat in the water,
 Like the sweet taste in honey,
 Like the fragrance in the blossom,
 Like ether in the air,
 And vision in the eye,
 Even so in the liberated state,
 God and the soul stand together,
 In eternal non-dual union.

The thirty-six principles, and
 The devas that activate them,
 And the resultant karma—
 Of, my Lord Sokkanatha,—
 Thou are the force directing these,—
 How then does agamya karma
 Accrue to me ?

My Knowledge functions only
 By uniting with the body,—
 If I could perceive this

With the Superior perception and
lose my consciousness in it,
Then will the state of Bliss last.
Where I to stray from this,
No more bliss for me.

Perceiving Grace, that I am
That consciousness and
Submitting the self to that,
Darkness will dissolve ;
And remaining One with It
Without activity,
That Silence is Bliss.

ON PRAYER

(Siva bhoga saram is an expression of the rich experience of God which Guru Jnanasambandhar had and so it does not have any line of prayer. The other poems have many lines of prayer, uttered on different occasions. The following are some of the prayerful lines written by him.)

Expel the fiend of desire in my mind,
To give place to ineffable realisation,
O Sokkanatha, Lord of Supreme Bliss.

Appear to me through some one,
Abide in my intellect and enlighten me,
Manifest Thyself as the Lord, and
Illumine me on earth,
to my heart's content,
O my mother, Sokkanatha.

Ever abide in me, O immaculate One,
Guide my intellect and remove the
Delusions in my mind and unite me
With the All-blissful and All-perfect,
My Lord Sokkanatha.

If thou enlightenest me, I can then see light. If
thou dost not, I cannot see light even for a moment.
Enlighten me then, my Lord Sokkanatha, annul all
my bonds and confer on me eternal bliss.

I know not, O Sokkanatha,
 What *karma* awaits this humble me,
 What *karma* Thy grace shall cause
 To be done through my person,
 What *karma* shall accrue to me in the future.
 But whatever my future be,
 Bestow Thy grace on me.

When the sorrows of life afflict me, I call to you a hundred times : is it fair that you do not respond, you who suckled the distressed litter like their own mother swine ?*

A mother cannot bear to see the suffering of her child. Can you bear to see my sufferings in this birth, although these are the result of my own *karma* ?

My Lord, art Thou not the righteous King who ruled justly over Madurai ? How is it that my forlorn cry of agony does not reach Thine ears ?

My Lord of Madurai, the Supreme
 Intelligence,
 The Lord of all souls and my own master,
 Grant me this boon that my lips always
 Lisp Thy prayer, my heart contemplates on Thee,
 And my body bows in salutation to Thee.

My Lord, Thou hast taken me
 As Thy servant, but yet Thy Grace
 Thou hast not bestowed on me.

*This is a sport of the Lord at Madurai.

People will taunt Thee were I
 To end my life. Realise this,
 My master, and admit me as Thy servant.

If a mother seeks to harm her child,
 who can help it ?

If Thou the Supreme guru
 Dost propose to adandon me,
 How am I to have realisation ?
 Bestow Thine Grace on me, my Lord.

Four are helps to man—
 The mother, father, the teacher and God.
 Thou hadst shown that Thine lotus feet
 Are all these four for me. But if now
 Thou shouldst neglect me,
 What can I say, O the immaculate One ?

Take pity on me, My Lord,
 Who am much distressed by the fivefold
 Taints of my soul ; my sense organs
 Have made me timid. Bestow on me
 Thy golden feet, O Lord Sokkanatha.

Even if Thou dost not bestow
 Thy grace on me now,
 But placest me in births
 suited to my *karma*
 Please stay inseparable
 with me in those births
 My Lord Sokkanatha.

HIS MESSAGE

(The author has a word to say to those who are perturbed over the trend of the changing times which seeks to uproot existing traditions and values. We should remember, he lived in a period when the Tamil ruling dynasties had ceased to exist, and the entire country, not only the Tamilnad, was under a muslim yoke. Religion and religious institutions suffered heavily at that period. He realised this and was naturally sad. But yet, he has re-emphasized a faith in God, who knew what was best.)

My Lord! The Siva temples are in great peril. Shall I blame the ruler of the land for this plight, or shall I blame You, You who only feed the fruits of our own *karma* ?

But let us not despair. We may consider our temples and religion to be in peril only if we concede that our Lord is weak. It is He who creates and destroys. Why should we reproach the others ?

(All that has been said so far is no doubt Guru Jnanasambandhar's message. Yet, there are many thoughts which he utters in a bold yet cryptic language. Some of them are couched in the most simple language, which has an appeal both to the masses as well as to the evolved souls.)

Lose not thyself in the pleasures of life,
 In the bonds of family and children.
 Lose thyself in Him, perceive Him
 Without a limited consciousness,
 Be united with Him and
 Let him be your ornament.

The scriptures say that those
 who suppress themselves are the great
 and those who call themselves great
 are indeed small. These small people
 carry the greatest burden of suffering.

Let not desires pursue Thee,
 Renounce them by your resolve,
 And set thy heart, set thy heart,
 On this Supreme. Realise that the world
 In all a myth, a myth, a myth.

Any quarter, any area of enjoyment,
 And deed, or any consequence
 Is not eternal. These are like the
 Images in a mirror, only seen by the mind
 And vanishing in no time.

Consider them as objects
 Seen in a mirror or in a dream.

Do not be deluded
 by your nation, place, name and land,
 by riches, rank and class,
 but realise Him who is all love
 and ever present in your intelligence.

When you esteem yourself to be high, consider the
 riches of those greater than you. When you consider

yourself poor, think of those who are humbler than you. Thus let no sorrow and suffering ever cloud your mind.

They mingle not with the ignorant
Who extoll the fleeting as the permanent.
But they will, maintain a silence,
Will immerse themselves in Siva, and
Get over their bonds and enjoy bliss.

They know not themselves,
They know not their Master,
They know not the functioning of their
past *karmas*.

But they go about, alas,
Calling themselves prophets.

What is the purpose of learning and the great difficulties undergone for that ? Is it to engage in disputation with the learned and bark ? Is it not to become servants to God and to conquer the mind ?

States ruled by the unjust,
Penances performed without
Putting on the sacred ash on the brow,
The preceptor who has not received
Grace from the Supreme perfect Light,
And the austerities of the uninitiated—
Ignore these as profitless.

Whatever thou mayst see with thy senses,
Whatever anyone may say,
Whatever likes or dislikes may be perceived,
Oh my mind, do not worry,

Decide after due enquiry.

The Lord, the souls, and the bonds,
And the five functions of Siva's grace
They all exist eternally.

And Lord Siva is always the just,
But why are a few enveloped in grace,
Some are in hell,
Some on the earth,
And some in the heavens ?

Sokkanatha,
 ever present in Madurai,
Grant me this boon that never
 into my mind
Shall enter the desire for woman
 and land and gold.

Oh my mind, be not agitated
Repeatedly I tell you, enquire into
Everything ; never wish evil to anyone,
Never forget good done to you.
Never be depressed.

BENEDICTION

Blessed be the Heavens,
The Vedas and the Agamas,
Blessed be the Lord and His Shrines,
Blessed be the Saiva Religion,
The Sacred Ash and Rudraksha,
Blessed be thy Spiritual Order
Of masters and men,
Blessed be the cow herds,
By the Grace of Jnanasambandha
of Dharmapuram.

GLOSSARY OF RELIGIOUS TERMS

Acharya	— spiritual teacher.
adhinam	— monastery, institution for religious administration.
agama	— the Saiva scripture, like the Veda.
ananda	— joy, bliss.
anava	— the first impurity of the soul in Saivism ; ignorance or the ego.
asura	— demon.
bhavana	— contemplation.
Brahman	— the Supreme Being.
charya	— Observance, manual service to God.
chit	— consciousness, being
dharma	— duty, justice, righteousness.
Dharma raja	— the God of Death, Yama.
diksha	— initiation.
guru	— preceptor.
guru puja	— worship on the anniversary day of a preceptor or saint.
jnana	— divine knowledge.
karma	— action.

kolam	— ornamental design drawn with rice flour on the ground during the auspicious occasions and in the morning.
kriya	— ritualistic worship, rites.
linga	— form ; the formless-form of Siva.
mala	— impurity, one of the bonds.
malai	— a garland (of flowers or verses).
mantra	—
maya	— generally called illusion, but much more in Saiva Siddhanta, the material cause.
murti	— image.
mutt (math)	— monastery.
pada	— part, path.
panchakshara	— the five mystic syllable pertaining to Siva.
paramparai	— line of succession.
prakasa	— illumination.
puja	— worship.
saiva	— a follower of Siva.
Sakti	— the Universal Mother, the inseparable consort of Siva ; the Power of God.
samadhi	— state of meditative oneness with the Spirit.
samaya	— religion.
sambandha	— connection.
santana	— lineage.
sastra	— scripture.
mukti	— liberation, salvation, moksha.
sat	— existence.
sivacharya	— one who has been assigned the duty of congregational worship of Siva in

- the temple from the very ancient past.
- | | |
|------------|---|
| Sokkanatha | — the handsome Lord. |
| tapas | — religious penance. |
| Tillai | — another name for Chidambaram. |
| tiru | — a prefix to names, places and books, signifying holy or sacred. |
| vaishnava | — a follower of Lord Vishnu. |
| veda | — sacred book of divine knowledge. |
| yoga | — thought control, union. |

